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PIANO NO MORI

by ISSHIKI Makoto
一色まこと

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Piano no Mori ch 224

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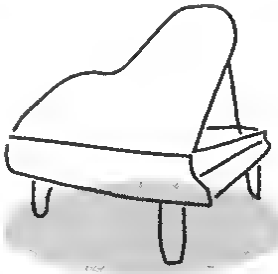

The Perfect World of KAI

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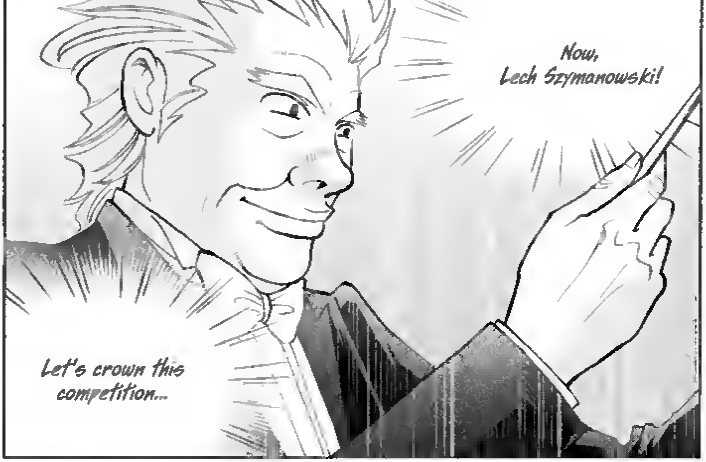
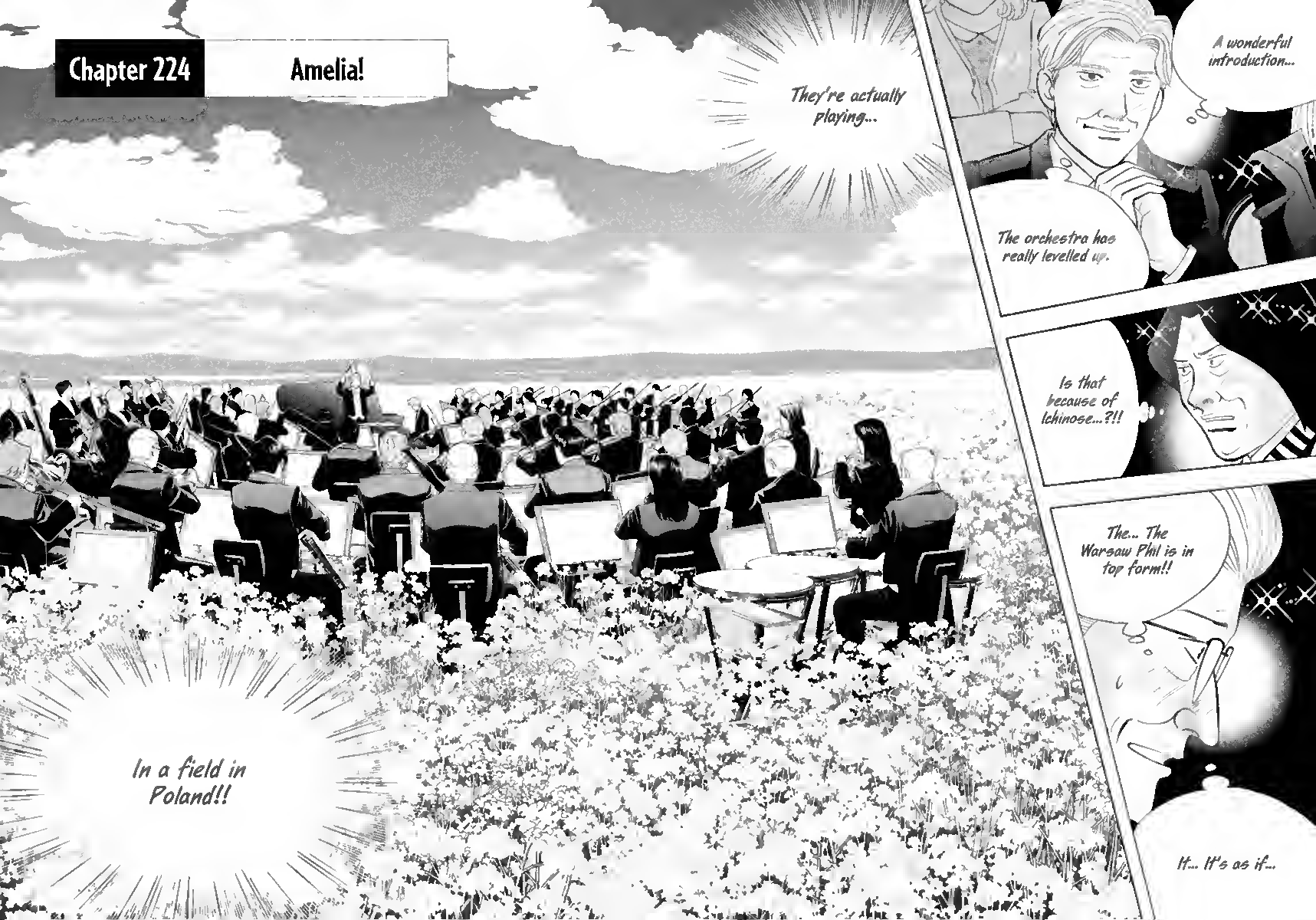
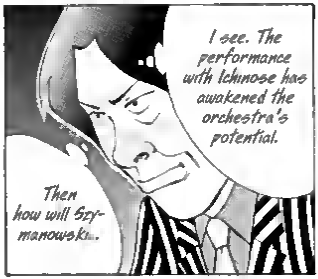
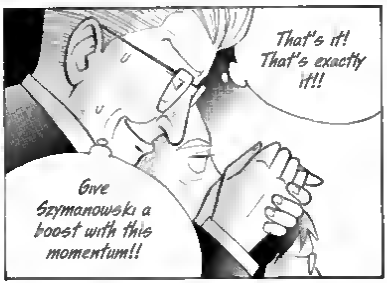

Now,
Lech Szymanowski!
Let's crown this competition...

With the best performance!!


Chapter 224
Amelia!
In a field in Poland!!
They're actually playing...
A wonderful introduction...
The orchestra has really levelled up.
Is that because of Ichinose...?!!
The... The Warsaw Phil is in top form!!
It... It's as if...

Looking good, Warsaw Phil!!

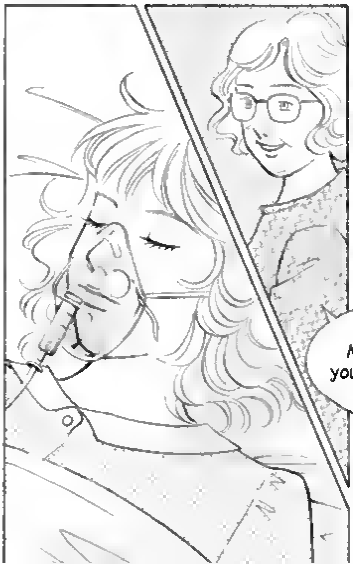

I see. The performance with Ichinose has awakened the orchestra's potential.
Then how will Szymanowski...


That's it! That's exactly it!!
Give Szymanowski a boost with this momentum!!

Respond?!

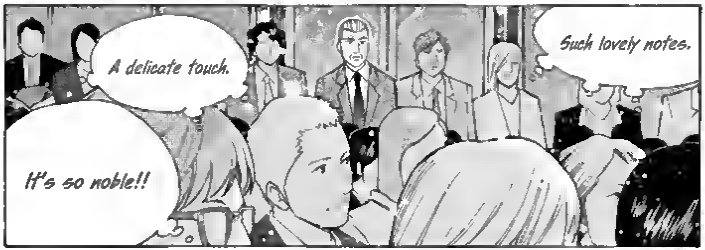
It's as if the performance of the orchestra...
Is projecting the gorgeous Polish scenery...
Right onto this stage.
You're here so that your very best piano playing can reach Amelia!
It's the same for you, isn't it, Lech?
If... If it's with this orchestra...
If it's under the guidance of the Warsaw Phil...

I can definitely play the best No. 1!!



Amelia,
Lech is playing!
Make sure you listen well.

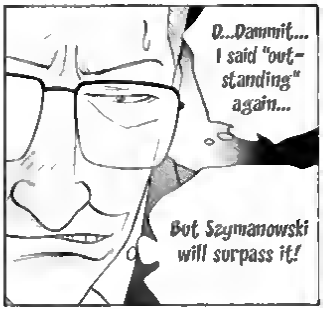
Amelia!
B...Beautiful.
Heh
Whoa!! Nice harmony!!!


A delicate touch.
Such lovely notes.
It's so noble!!

...But...
That's it!!
But Ichinose isn't even Polish...
The naturalness of the Mazurka and Polonaise only belongs to Poland, our country.

Amelia!
Lech...
Lech...
This playing is...
I am playing the best No. 1 I have ever played...
For Amelia's sake.
But of course, Amelia...
The Concerto No. 1 you played is the best!!

Looking good, Szymanowski.
Keep this up and you'll outdo Ichinose's outstanding performance!!


D...Dammit.... I said "outstanding" again...
But Szymanowski will surpass it!

Hmm. He plays well.

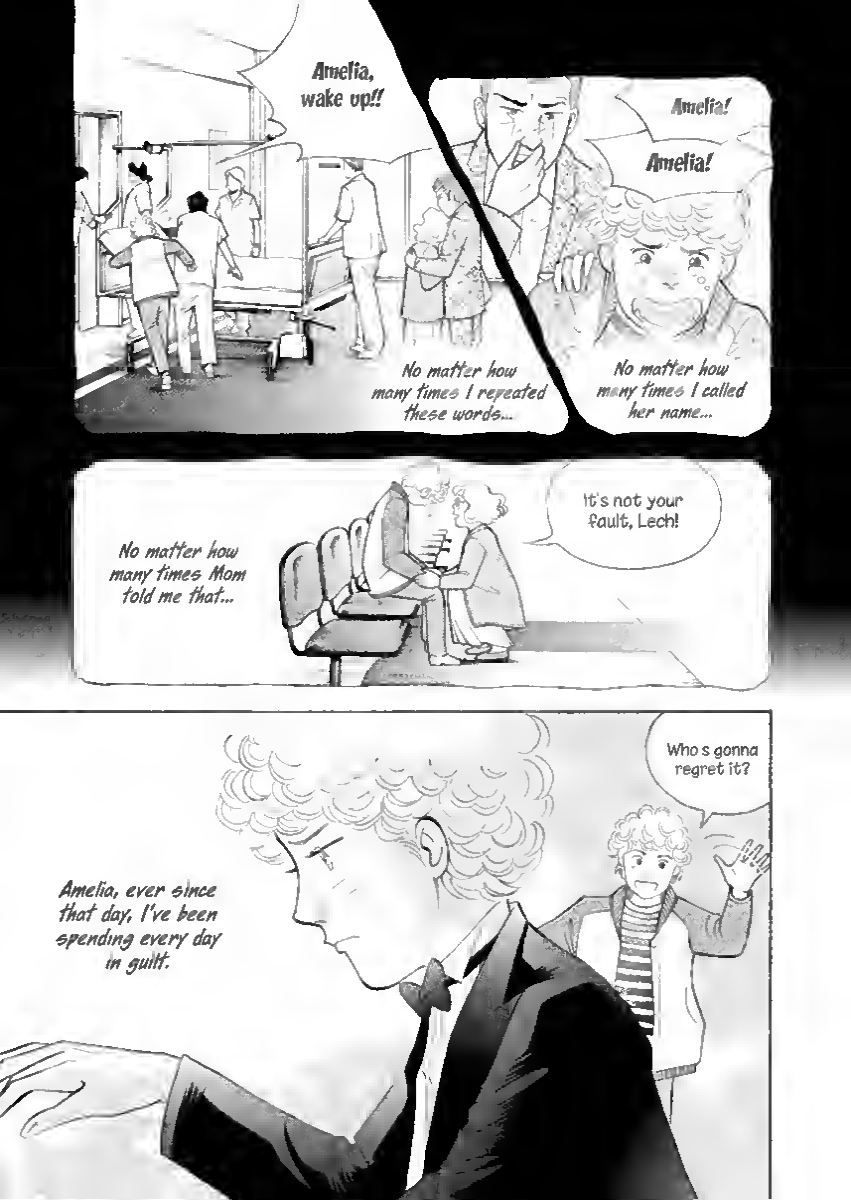
SURPASS IT!!!!

Ah. His grandfather's blood...
A pianist's blood definitely runs in his veins.
Lech is capable of playing such music...
Lech...
Amelia!
Ever since that day...
I've been living with this guilt day after day.
That day...
If I had not ditched Dymitr's lesson...

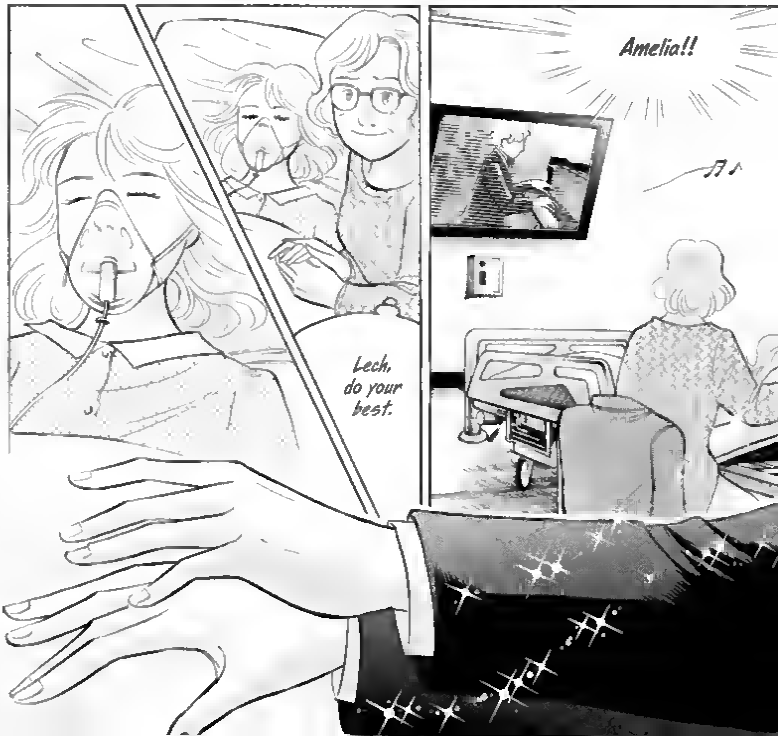
"Are you really not going?"
"I told you! I've made an important promise to Polon!"
Dad won't buy any of that, you know?
He's already furious with you!
Geez... Polon is a bird, right?

It's almost time. I'm going!
Can't keep a great pianist waiting, can I?
Whenever I'm with my grandfather Dymitr,
I get so nervous I can't play anything.
Then I'll go in your place!
If you're passing up on the lesson, then it's my chance!
Don't regret it when I'm the only one going places, okay?
Who's gonna regret it?
That's the last memory I have...
Of Amelia being up and about...

Was the cause of her accident...
The bus that I was meant to take...
35
5321
Even though the operation was a success...
Even though Amelia's life was saved...
Ever since that day, Amelia never regained consciousness.


Amelia, wake up!!
No matter how many times I repeated these words...
Amelia!
Amelia!
No matter how many times I called her name...
No matter how many times Mom told me that...
It's not your fault, Lech!
Amelia, ever since that day, I've been spending every day in guilt.
Who's gonna regret it?

So I've become your replacement.
I'm playing the piano in your place!


Amelia!!
Lech, do your best.

Ichinose, Wei Pang...
The coda is just as marvelous.
Only a selected few have such sense and touch over the piano. This young man, too...
Such an exquisite touch can't be achieved with just hard work.

Has definitely been passed onto his grandson.
Dymitr Szymanowski's elegant touch...

Now that I think about it, have I ever believed in Lech at all?!
I just can't believe it.
SLAP
Enough is enough!!
Lech is actually playing so well here...

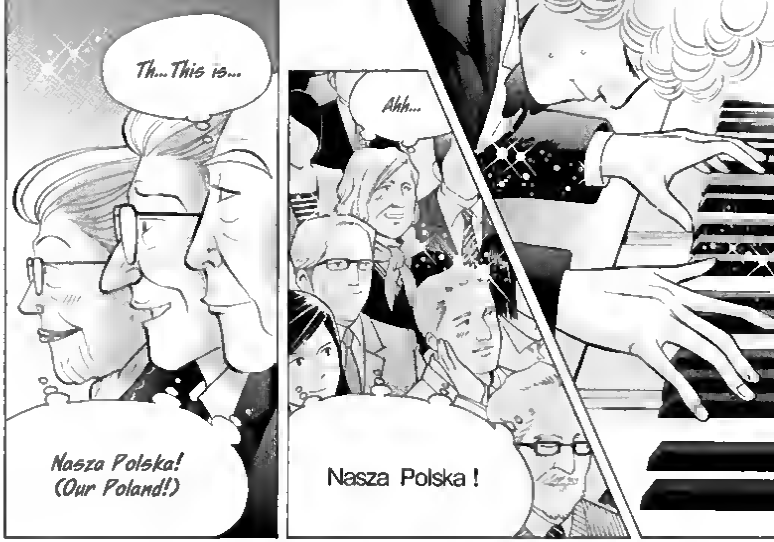
"I'LL DEFINITELY WAKE UP AND GET BETTER. HAVE FAITH!"
AMELIA TOLD ME JUST NOW!
I'm not lying!
That's really what Amelia had said!
I'M NOT!
IT'S TRUE!!
You lied about birds and bugs!
Now you're lying about Amelia!
"Then you believe what Lech said?!"
Lech...

How is this different from being dead?!
Darling, don't say that...
She'll definitely come to.
WHEN?! WHEN WILL SHE WAKE UP?!
Yes, I do.
I want to.
Tech!
Ah!
"Sir..."

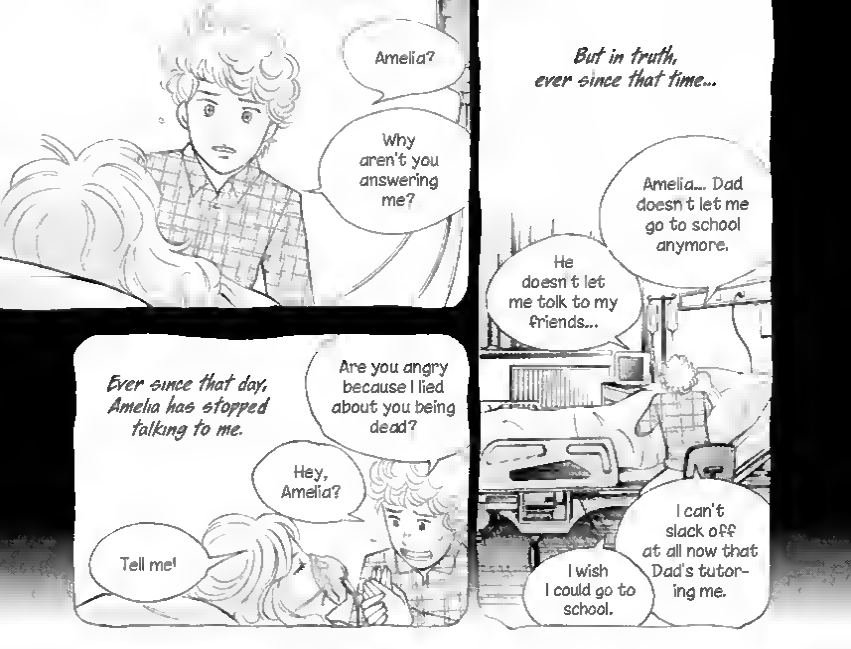
Today at school... Lech said something about Amelia to his classmates...
Amelia is dead.
W...What is it?
What has Lech done...?
I killed her.
Ahh...
Lech...
The students caused a bit of a commotion hearing that...
Huh?

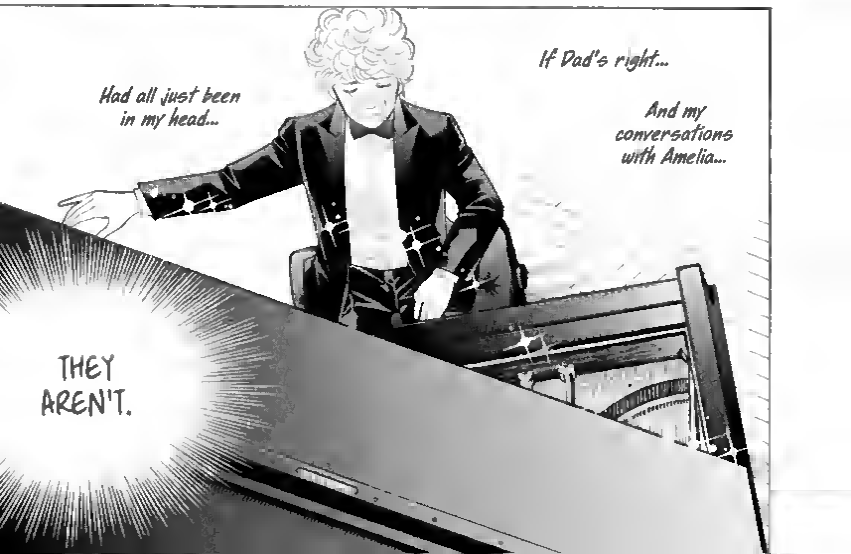
MOVEMENT 2
I've come to study in Poland in search of such music.
But this Lech... seems to have a lot of complicated problems.
Gorgeous ...
We used to play it on two pianos.
You even laughed at my messy accompaniment.
Amelia...
This is Movement 2, your favorite.

Amelia,
I would give absolutely anything...
Amelia,
I feel so guilty every day.
If I had kept my promise with Dymitr...
The one playing here today would be you.
If only I could go back to that day.


Th...This is...
Nasza Polska!
(Our Poland!)
Ahh...
Nasza Polska !

Lech...
If... by any chance... Lech really wasn't lying...
Amelia, I'm a liar.
I've been pretending to have conversations with you.


Amelia?
Why aren't you answering me?
But in truth, ever since that time...
Amelia... Dad doesn't let me go to school anymore.
He doesn't let me talk to my friends...
I wish I could go to school.
I can't slack off at all now that Dad's tutoring me.
Ever since that day, Amelia has stopped talking to me.
Are you angry because I lied about you being dead?
Hey, Amelia?
Tell me!


Had all just been in my head...
If Dad's right...
And my conversations with Amelia...
THEY AREN'T.

THEY AREN'T MAKE-BELIEVE, LECH!

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN TALKING TO YOU, LECH.

Amelia!

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DOUBT YOURSELF
JUST BECAUSE YOU COULDN'T HEAR MY VOICE

Amelia!
A...

HEY, THIS IS NO PLACE TO CRY.
IT'S ALMOST TIME FOR THE PIANO TO JOIN IN.

Amelia!
Amelia!

!!?
THE PIANO...
POLAND'S CHOPIN...
IS ALL OVER THE PLACE!!
Amelia! END

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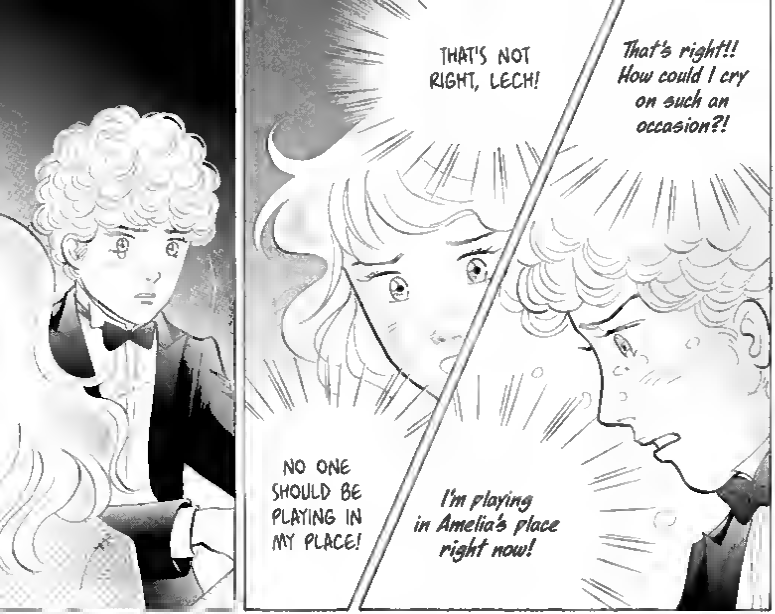
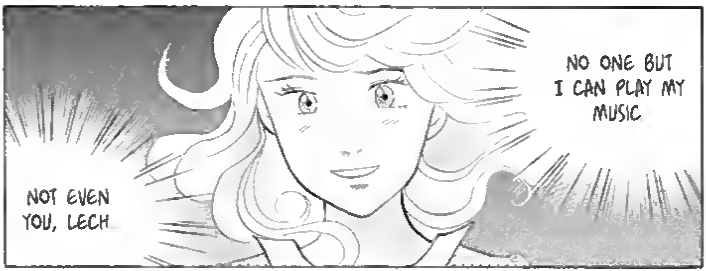
Chapter 225 Ahead

DON'T CRY, LECH!
YOU HAVE TO CONCENTRATE ON PLAYING!
Oh no!
Is the piano...
CRYING?!

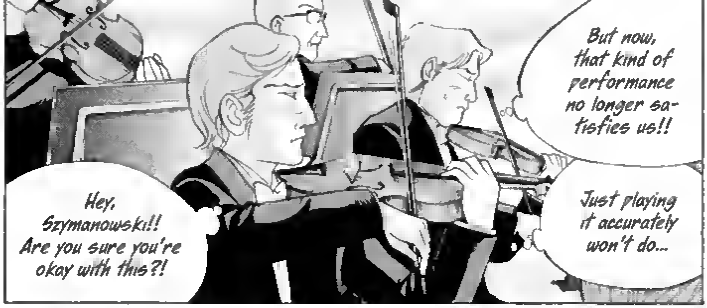

THAT'S NOT RIGHT, LECH!
That's right!! How could I cry on such an occasion?!
NO ONE SHOULD BE PLAYING IN MY PLACE!
I'm playing in Amelia's place right now!

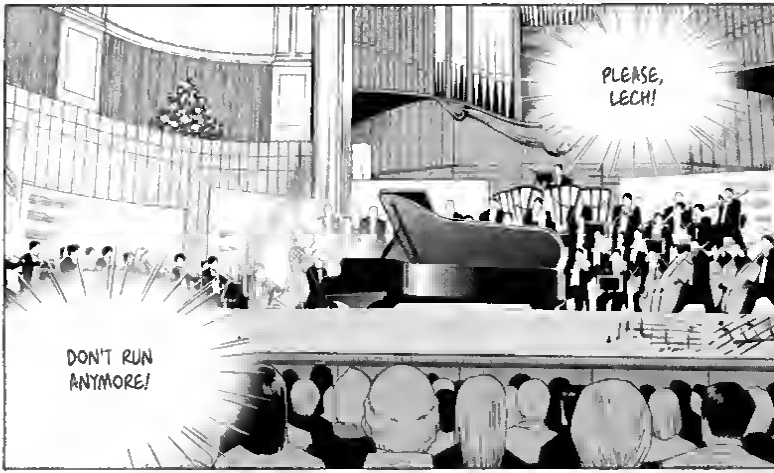

NO ONE BUT I CAN PLAY MY MUSIC
NOT EVEN YOU, LECH

YOU PLAY YOUR OWN MUSIC.

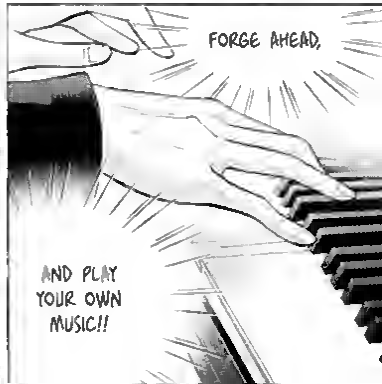
SO PLEASE...
STOP PLAYING THE PIANO IN GUILT!!
YOU'VE ALREADY HAD ENOUGH OF THAT!
LIVING IN GUILT DAY AFTER DAY, YEAR AFTER YEAR.
STEINWAY
HAS TIME STOPPED FOR YOU AT THAT MOMENT?

I...
Is the piano...
Going off on its own??
If that mishap had happened earlier,
We could've compensated for it...
But our communication still seems to be off.
It's as if his antenna was broken...
It's relief that it's settled down again...

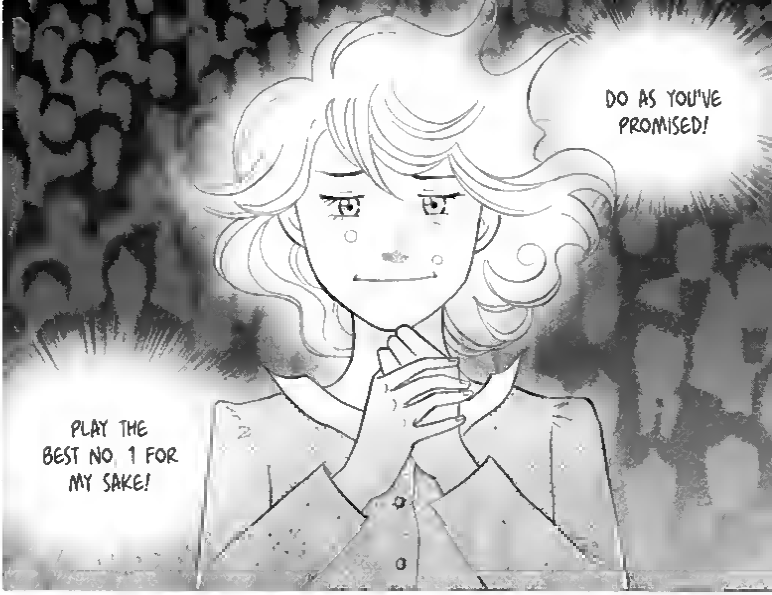

But now, that kind of performance no longer satisfies us!!
Just playing it accurately won't do...
Hey, Szymanowski!! Are you sure you're okay with this?!

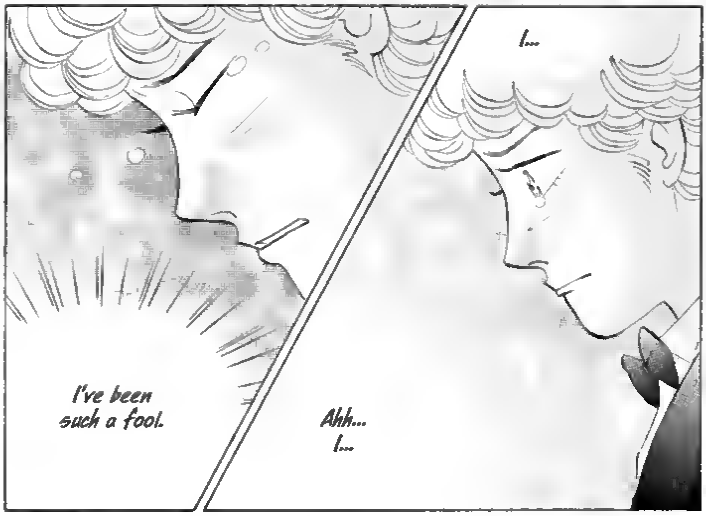

PLEASE, LECH!
DON'T RUN ANYMORE!

I...


FORGE AHEAD,
AND PLAY YOUR OWN MUSIC!!

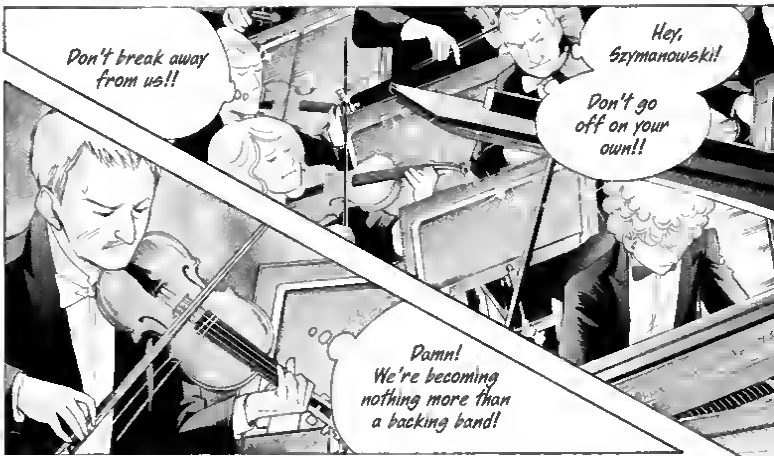
FORGE AHEAD! DON'T LET THIS CHANCE SLIP AWAY!!
YOU'RE ON THE BEST STAGE.
LISTEN TO THE ORCHESTRA
FOCUS!
WITH THE BEST ORCHESTRA...
SO PLAY THE BEST YOU CAN ON THE PIANO, LECH!!

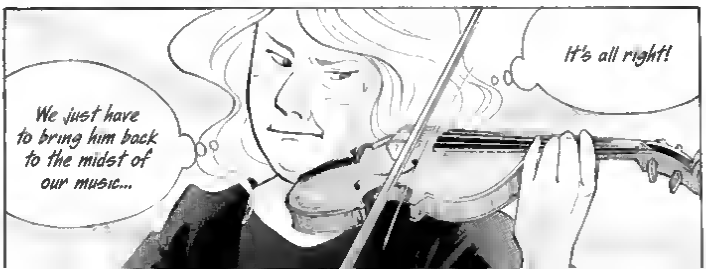

DO AS YOU'VE PROMISED!
PLAY THE BEST NO. 1 FOR MY SAKE!


I...
I've been such a fool.
Ahh... I...

I've always been running away.
And I've never looked at this problem in the eye...
I was absolutely terrified.
Of being judged and evaluated by others.
"The talent skipped a generation, huh..."
"Not only do you look like Dymitr, you even have the same hands."
"You can probably do what I haven't been able to, Lech."
"You look just like me, Lech! I'm sure you'll also grow up to be an amazing pianist!"

I was terrified... of not being able to meet everyone's expectations...
I have always been hiding in Amelia's shadow!!


Don't break away from us!!
Hey, Szymanowski!
Don't go off on your own!!
Damn! We're becoming nothing more than a backing band!


We just have to bring him back to the midst of our music...
It's all right!

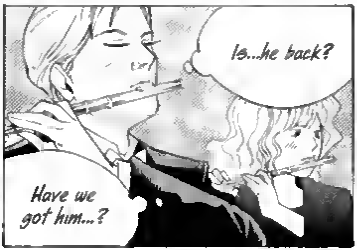
Listen, Lech!!
To our music!!
Lech!
Lech!
Lech Szymanowski!!!

Can you hear us?
You are now...
Right now, we are connected!
In our embrace...
An embrace strong and warm like a Polish forest...

Only an idiot wouldn't make good use of us!!
I...
I'm such a fool.
If...
Lech!! Don't fight on your own!!

I only take a step...
Forward!

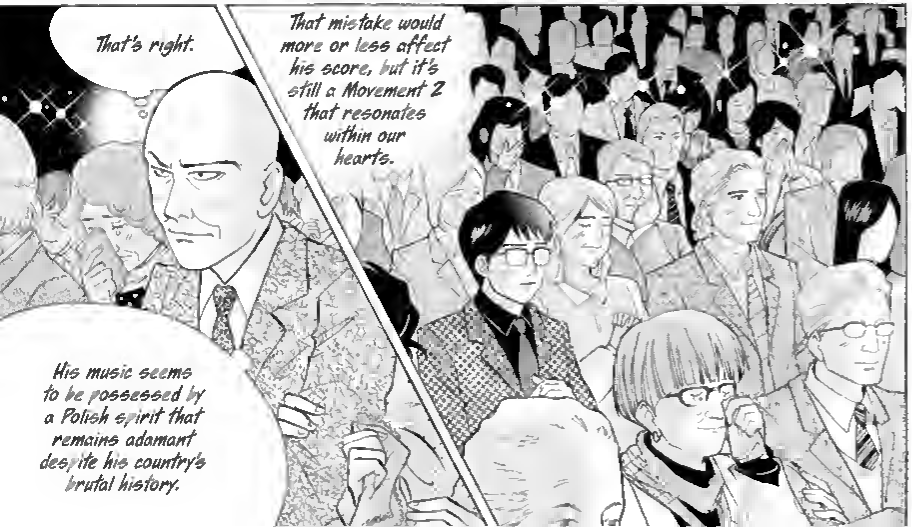
Will we make it?
Don't worry! The real show starts now!


Is...he back?
Have we got him...?

I don't want to spend my whole life looking backward!
I don't want to stay rooted in a place anymore!!

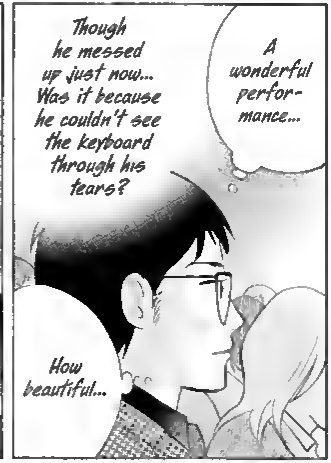
Go forward...
Let's forge ahead...
It doesn't matter where. Just go!!
Forward...
Together!!

For the sake of going forward!!


That's right.
His music seems to be possessed by a Polish spirit that remains adamant despite his country's brutal history.
That mistake would more or less affect his score, but it's still a Movement 2 that resonates within our hearts.

That little mistake wasn't a big deal.
But don't make the same mistake again, you hear?

Thank... Thank God...
The piano is back on track.


Though he messed up just now... Was it because he couldn't see the keyboard through his tears?
A wonderful performance...
How beautiful...

Hurry up.
Get in before the next movement starts...

Having entered Movement 3...
Lech.

Lech Szyma-nowski's playing...

Becomes even more indescribable...

The Krakowiak...
A traditional dance of the Polish people.

Don't tell me... this guy's also something like a prodigy...?

No... I gather it's even better?
Is every bit as good as the Berlin Phil's...
The Warsaw Phil's performance...

By this dance that originated from Poland...
That belongs to Poland...
Everyone in the hall is being swept along...
Their performance is so passionate, it's almost as if they were dancing...

The Krakowiak!!
The Krakowiak!
The Krakowiak!

Ahead END

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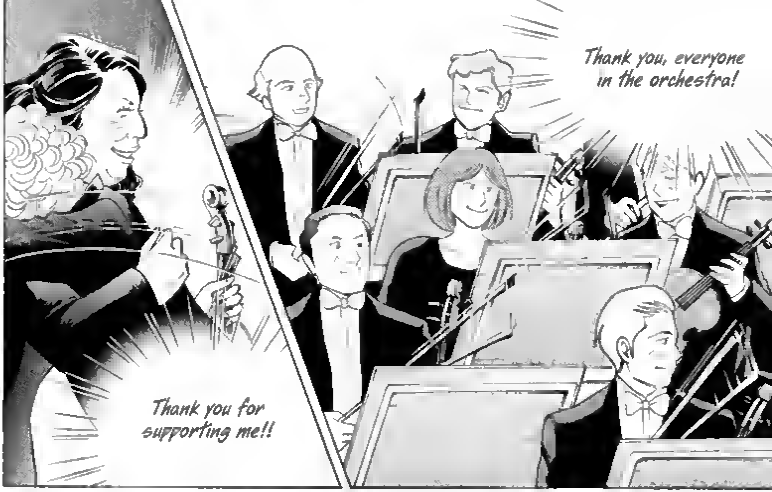
Chapter 226
Thank You

The cheering has completely drowned out the orchestra's final part.
My...my ears...
Lech!!
Yes!!!!
You did it, Szymanowski! Well done!!!
NASZA POLSKA!!
(OUR POLAND)

Ah...
Just played...
I...
It was the orchestra...
The best No. 1 I have ever played!!

Lech!
Did you do your best for Amelia's sake?
That drew out my finest performance!!
Thank you, Mr. Kord!!
I did.
Thank you!

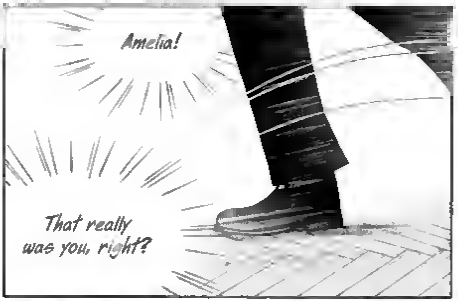

Thank you, everyone in the orchestra!
Thank you for supporting me!!

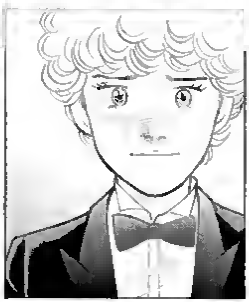
NASZA POLSKA!!
NASZA POLSKA!!

Amelia...
Until the moment I finished playing,
I had put everything about you,
About Dymitr...
And about my regrets completely from my mind.
I merely focused on my performance.

This is the first time...
I've played the piano like this!
Thank you, Amelia!!
If you hadn't come, I would still be playing the piano just to seek repentance.
Where...
Where are you?
Amelia.
Amelia?

.....
.....
.....


Amelia!
That really was you, right?



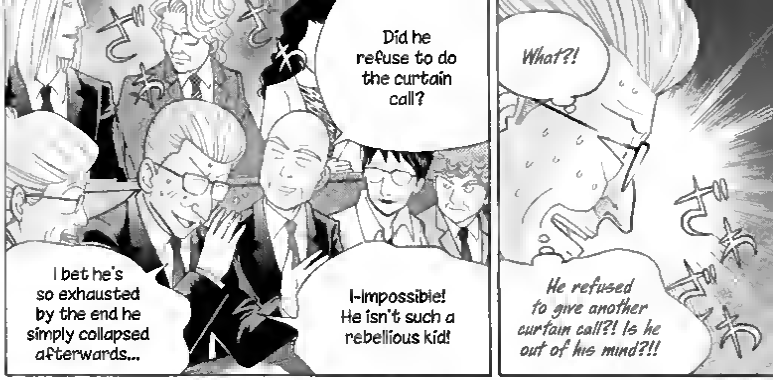
That wasn't just a figment...
Of my imagination, right?!!

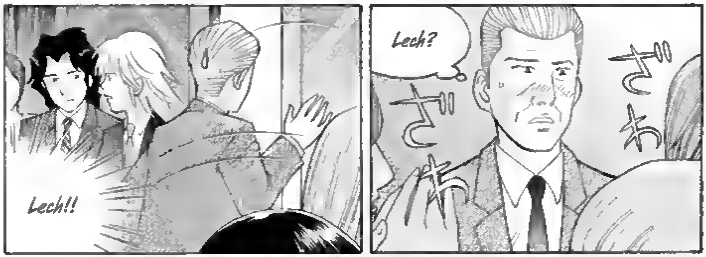
I'm sure about that!!
Amelia did come to my rescue!!
Huh??
Just a minute!
Mr. Szymanowski!!

Mr...
Mr. Szymanow...
Huh?!
....
...ski...
Amelia!!!

Is apparent in the thunderous applause and cheering...
The tremendous support the people have for the local new star...
Good, good. Keep it going!!
At this rate, his curtain call will outshine Ichinose's!!!
To play so brilliantly after that performance given by Kai...
I hate to say this, but you have my respect.
Szymanowski really is something.
Tai-san is so cute.
Indeed!
Good for Lech, right?!
A...Amazing, wasn't it?!
I'm glad to have listened to him play, even if just for Movement 3.

Answering the enthusiastic crowd...
But why isn't Szymanowski...
Huh??
Mutter
With another curtain call?
Rustle
Uh... That concludes all the performances for the competition


Did he refuse to do the curtain call?
I bet he's so exhausted by the end he simply collapsed afterwards...
I-impossible! He isn't such a rebellious kid!
What?!
He refused to give another curtain call?! Is he out of his mind?!!


Lech!!
Lech?

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the judging panel, contestants,
And members of the philharmonic orchestra...

Thank you for your hard work...
Throughout the course of the competition!!

And now, the judges will retire to their deliberations...
The result of their impartial adjudication will be announced in about two hours. Please gather in the lobby on the first floor...

It'll take ten... no... fifteen minutes to get you ta the hospital.
Then pardon my rudeness, but please do it in ten!

Hmm... This kid is...
Haha! I'll do my best as long as safety allows!

Grandpa Dymitr died two years after Amelia's accident.
He left a large sum of money to cover Amelia's medical fees...

Why did she come to my rescue today?
That wasn't the first time I was in danger...

Amelia...

So why today?
Why did she come and save me?!

No matter how many times I had thought about putting an end to my own existence...
She hadn't come to me even once!

Chances are... Amelia is no longer...
SCREECH

Um... I'm really sorry! But I don't have any cash on me...
Please tell them at the register that the bill is on Szymanowski...
I know it's a bit of a trouble...

We're here. I rushed as much as I could, it only took thirteen minutes!
Th... Thank you very much.

Could you, by any chance...
Be Mr. Lech Szymanowski?

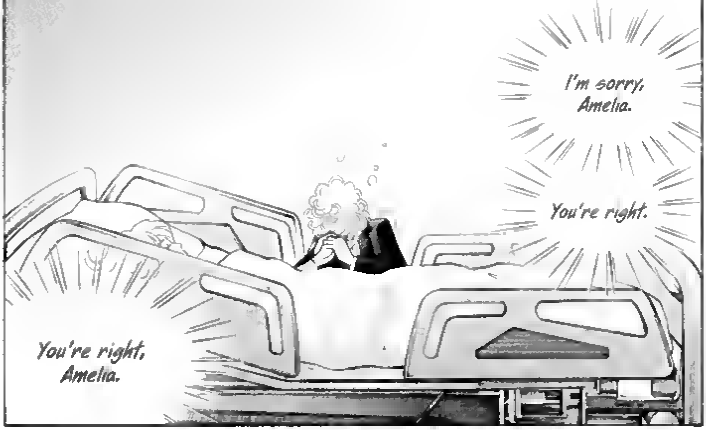
Huh?
Haha! So I was right...
Well... I've been listening to your performance all the while on the radio.
In that case, I won't charge you!
Huh?
Yes, that's me.
But your performance was so touching it drove me to tears.
I honestly didn't expect I'd give the guy a lift after that...
I just want to show my gratitude with this.
Thank you so much! Take care!
TAXI
ブオオ
Ah...

Amelia!!
My...
My playing made someone happy!!
It's just like what you've said!

So, Amelia...
Don't go!

Tremble...
Thud
Breathe...
Seriously, thank god!
I thought you were dead!
Th...Thank god!
You're still alive...
Th...

THAT'S MEAN,
LECH.
When you came to help me out on the stage...
I thought you were telling me goodbye in your final moments.
DON'T KILL ME OFF ON YOUR OWN!
!?
DIDN'T I TELL YOU I'D DEFINITELY WAKE UP? DIDN'T I TELL YOU TO WAIT?


I'm sorry, Amelia.
You're right.
You're right, Amelia.

We all watched you on TV!!
Hug
Your playing at the end was truly amazing!!

Oh, you're here, Lech?!

Ah. Did you notice?
Amelia is breathing much more smoothly!
It must be thanks to your playing!
Hold on... Is it okay for you to be here?
Won't they be announcing the result soon?
Your mother has just left for the venue.

TWO MORE HOURS TILL
THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE RESULT!
Thank You END

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Piano no Mori ch 227

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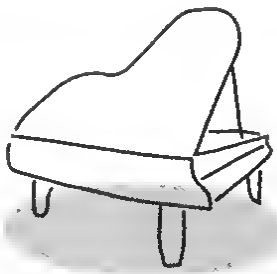
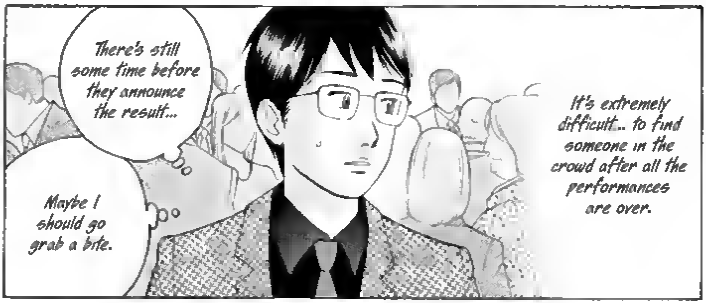


The Perfect World of KAI

Chapter 227 The Destined Pianist

I'm searching for Kai.

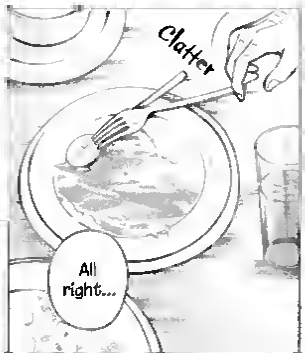

There's still some time before they announce the result...
Maybe I should go grab a bite.
It's extremely difficult... to find someone in the crowd after all the performances are over.

Ah.
A... Amamiya-kun!

Takako-san!

SKA

Let's get down to business!
Now that our stomachs are filled, Satoru...


Clatter
All right...

Business?

We... have discussed it many times among ourselves ever since we arrived in Warsaw...
Oh? What have you been talking about behind my back?

I know you have always aimed at becoming a piano tuner like me, Satoru...
But we have all been thinking... Maybe it isn't such a bad idea if you walk the path of a pianist.

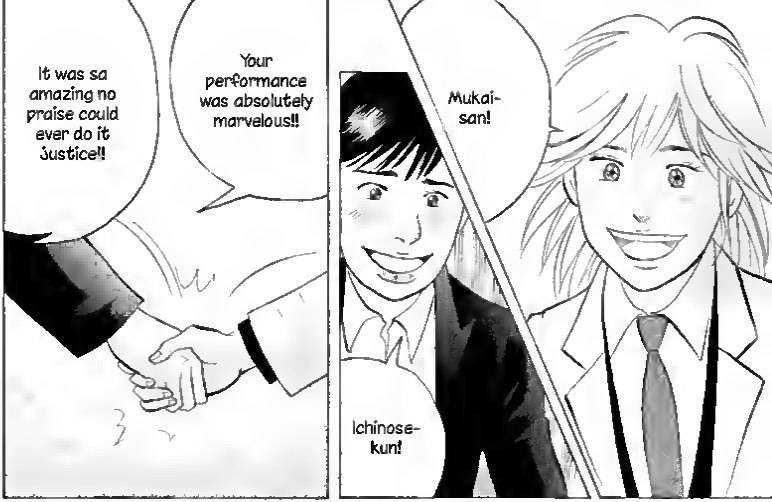
I just love your piano playing!!
The result doesn't matter.
Ehhh...
But the result isn't even out yet.
I feel proud of having a son like you. From the bottom of my heart.
You can still become a piano tuner after you retire as a pianist, right?!
I think this competition could be a huge turning point for you...
It is!
I'm very, very glad to have participated in it!
It has really lit my way... I can finally see where I'll be going from now on!

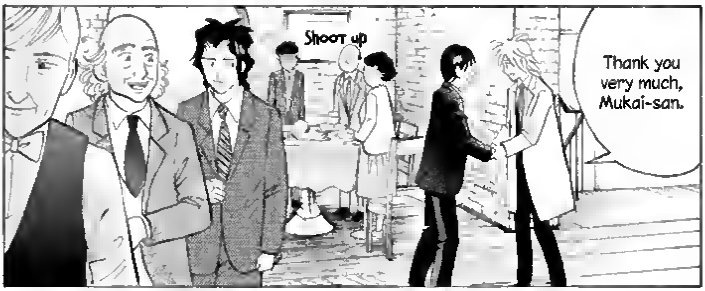
I'm gonna become the best piano tuner in the world!
And what exactly is that?
Ba-dump Ba-dump
Ba-dump Ba-dump
L-Lit your way...
Satoru!
Huh?
I have exceptionally sharp ears...
Not to mention...
You know, too, don't you?
No one can switch from being a pianist to a piano tuner. Having the best of both worlds is just wishful thinking.

I've always wanted ta became someone like you. That's what's been driving me all this time.
Ever since I was a kid...
I have heartfelt respect for both you and your work, Dad.
Satoru
I'm going to work towards this goal with all my might!!
I want to become his exclusive tuner!!
And I've met my destined pianist here at the competition!

No way.
Ah.
SHOCK
Wh...Who would that be??
He...
Your destined pianist?
Huh?!
Huh???

IT'S J-J-J-JEAN-JACQUES SERRAULT AND AJINO SOUSUKE AND ICHINOSE-KUN!
D... Darling...
...Satoru really has to hurry...
Your destined pianist is Jean-Jacques Serrault, the God of Piano?!
Don't... tell me...
N...No, you've got the wrong idea!
Indeed... Judging by Serrault's age...


It was sa amazing no praise could ever do it justice!!
Your performance was absolutely marvelous!!
Mukai-san!
Ichinose-kun!


Shoot up
Thank you very much, Mukai-san.

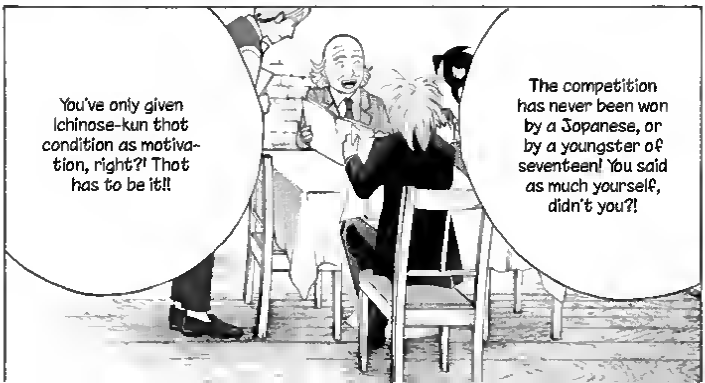
What... What was it?
Hmm?
I was so thrilled by Wei Pang's performance back then I forgot to tell you something very important...
Huh?
Actually, it's all thanks to you!

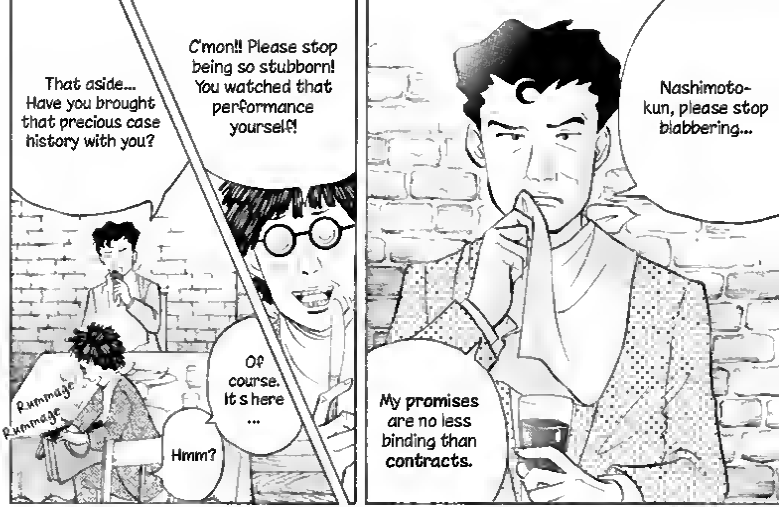
From the way you play, Mukai-san...
I have learned... how to cherish each note and play them all with care...
Ah...
I'm so sorry about that!
I only listened to your playing for the first time in the finals...
It doesn't matter! It's not that worth listening to anyway...
Huh?
Ah...
Thank you so much! This makes me really happy!
You actually noticed? I guess I shouldn't have expected any less.
You...
Listening to your playing meant a lot to me during the finals!

Click
I hope the Judges also noticed...
I'm sure they did...
And so did the audience!
Cheese!!
I-I'm SORRY!
CHON, STOP IT!
NO WAY!
WHOA!
We're done eating, so let's go already!
Doctor!
Doctor...
Doctor Nakao!

But the Japonese concerned with the competition have all come flocking here...
What's going on? I only came because I heard this was a discreet restourant...
He's with Jean-Jacuqes Serrault and Mr. Ajino!
It's the Ichinose boy!

Just toke it back and let him have some peace of mind!
The one about performing the surgery on the condition that Ichinose-kun comes first!
Come now. Isn't this the perfect chance for you to retract that outrageous demand you made last time?


You've only given Ichinose-kun that condition as motivation, right?! That has to be it!!
The competition has never been won by a Japanese, or by a youngster of seventeen! You said as much yourself, didn't you?!


Nashimoto-kun, please stop blabbering...
My promises are no less binding than contracts.
C'mon!! Please stop being so stubborn! You watched that performance yourself!
That aside... Have you brought that precious case history with you?
Of course. It's here ...
Hmm?
Rummage Rummage

Then can't you just yank out two or three tubes or something?
All right. Keep in touch!
What?
He still hasn't kicked the bucket??
Still in critical condition...?
Beep

Hao should just drop dead already...
For everyone's good.
What a tenacious bastard...
BUMP

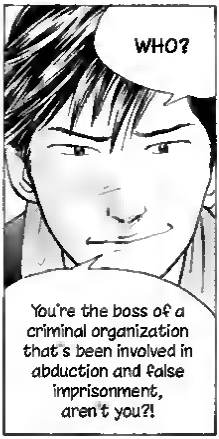
Ack!
YOU watch where you're going.
Watch where you're going!
Pissed
Wei...
Wei Pang!
My, my! What a splendid performance you gave!
I'm really proud of you!!
You're the hero of our country!
O...Oh hey, Wei!!
What a coincidence!!

First place will be in the bag for you for sure!
The adjudication will be over right away! It won't drag on forever and ever this time!
In any case, I should keep quiet about Hao in front of this kid.
It'd be a hassle to explain.

And you, our dear Wei Pang...
Will claim another victory in this Chopin Competition right after Long-Thibaud!! You'll be indomitable!!
If you leave everything to us...

EEEK!

You. Don't do anything.
You understand?

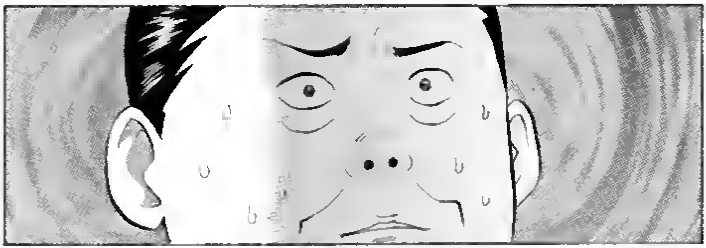

WHO?
You're the boss of a criminal organization that's been involved in abduction and false imprisonment, aren't you?!

WH...WHO ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT...?

Don't utter a word about me...
Don't even wriggle a finger! That's what I mean.
If you don't stay put, someone's gonna have his sorry ass put in jail until the result is released!

It's not terribly difficult to get you locked up, you know.
At this rate, the police could very well turn up all of a sudden.

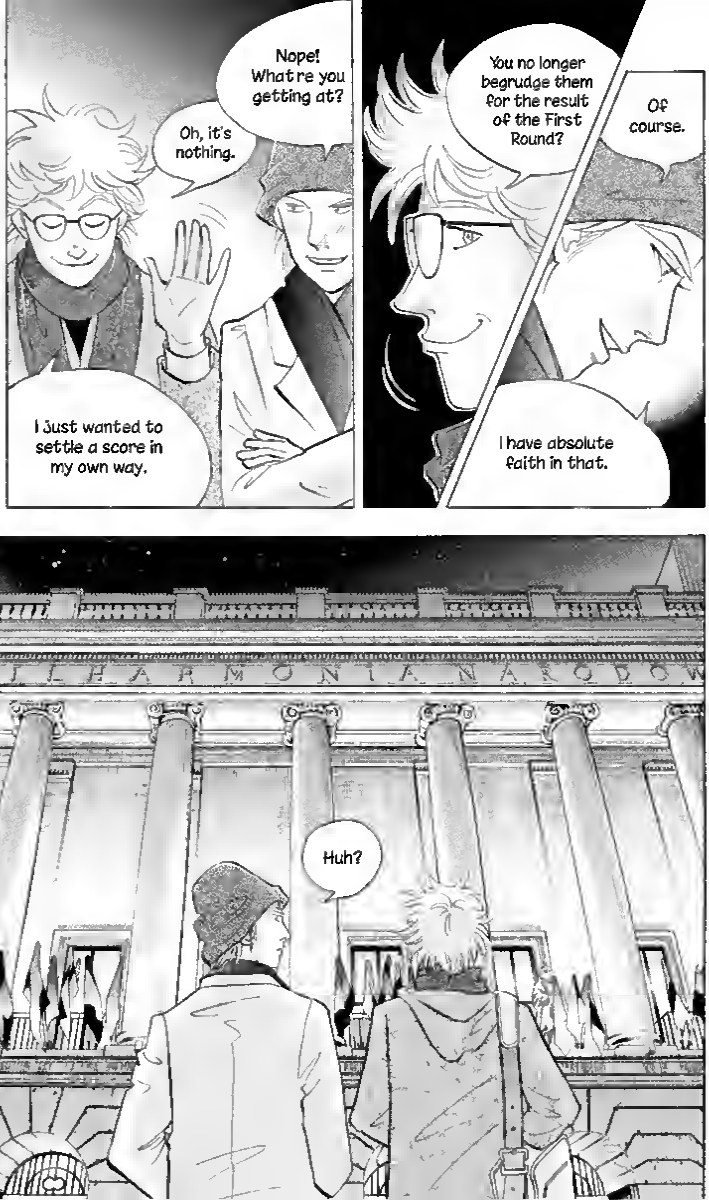
Swear that you won't interfere in the competition again!
Or else, I'll...



We'd better head back to the venue,
Or we won't be able to get a good spot.
SIMON HAUSNER
JOURNALIST
Oh!
Shit. Only an hour till the announce-ment.

ガヤ
ガヤ
ガヤ
ガヤ
Nah... There should still be plenty of room left.
KAROL ADAMSKI
(ELIMINATED IN THE FIRST ROUND · POLISH)
As if!
The winner of this once-every-five-years competition will be declared!
C'mon, Karol! Let's go!
We gotta see things to the end!

Still, thank goodness...
That they've stopped banning you from entering the venue.
I negotiated with Chairman Jasinski directly.
I ambushed him at the hotel he's staying in.
Haha... Way ta go.
Indeed.
It was my fault that you got banned from the hall... I felt really guilty about it.
Your fault? Nah...
I did it for justice.
Say, Karol,
You think the final deliberation will go in the right direction?


Nope! What're you getting at?
Oh, it's nothing.
I just wanted to settle a score in my own way.
You no longer begrudge them for the result of the First Round?
Of course.
I have absolute faith in that.
FILHARMONIA NARODOW
Huh?

I did it for the sake of fair adjudication.
I gave them a smack in the hand, so to speak!
I didn't do it to avenge you.

The rest is up to Jasinski... Still...

....
....
ADAM JASIŃSKI
CHAIRMAN OF THE JUDGING PANEL
The Destined Pianist END

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Hey, Simon...
Seriously, what the hell did you do?

A proposal?

I merely prepared a proposal for this competition...
And showed it to Chairman Jasinski.

Haha. Nothing big.

Chapter 228
For the Sake of Fair Adjudication
Hana...
That proposal was the main reason why...
I came to the competition in the first place.
SALAKONCERTOVA
SALAKONCERTO
TAXI

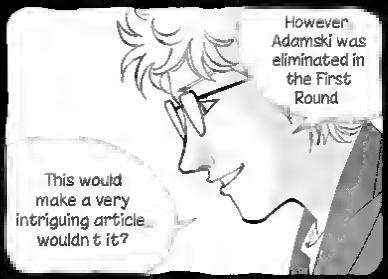
It's that big a deal!
Good day, Mr. Jasinski.
There is something I wish to show you no matter what, Chairman.
Let's go somewhere in the direction of the hall...
I won't take up much of your time.

This was originally a project developed to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the music magazine Muse.
What is this?
Seven pianists, renowned worldwide...
Have been asked to give their own scores for the contestants in this competition.

So...so many famous pianists are on board.
It must have taken a lot of time and effort to put this together...
competition garners a lot of public attention, right?
There must be plenty of people dissatisfied with the judging results so far.

In order to ensure fairness, the names of the contestants were obscured...
And represented by numbers instead.
The audio files of the performances of 31 contestants—the 30 semi-finalists plus Karol Adamski—were passed on to them.

As it happens, Karol Adamski is number 12.
Of course, each of the pianists has their own preferences...
But all seven of them have given number 12 very high scores.


However Adamski was eliminated in the First Round
This would make a very intriguing article wouldn't it?

In that case, he should be among the top ten, right?

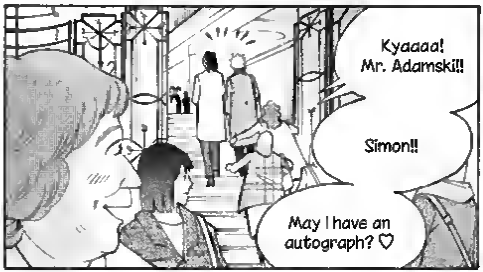
What are you trying to say?

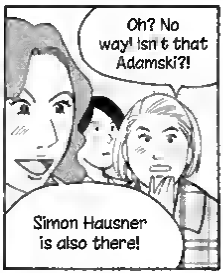
So, Mr. Hausner.
The ratings for the Second Round, as well as the Finals, are currently underway...

I am asking if you would give me leave...
This time, I'm going to compare the scores given by those seven pianists...
To publish your score sheets in the magazine.
With the results determined by the competition judges... and write an article on whatever discrepancies there may be!
If you agree to this,
Please give me a copy of all the score sheets for this round...
After the final results are released!
Smile
Humph

SOFITEL
I refuse.
Fufu.
Haha... I don't get what you're saying at all...
But I have a feeling... That I have paved the way...
To fair adjudication!
Well... I did expect him to turn down my request right away!

Huhhh?
But if it ever gets published, I'll give you a copy first thing!
But the project is still under wraps, so I can't say anything about it.
Of course you don't. Sorry about that!


Kyaaaa! Mr. Adamski!!
Simon!!
May I have an autograph? ♡

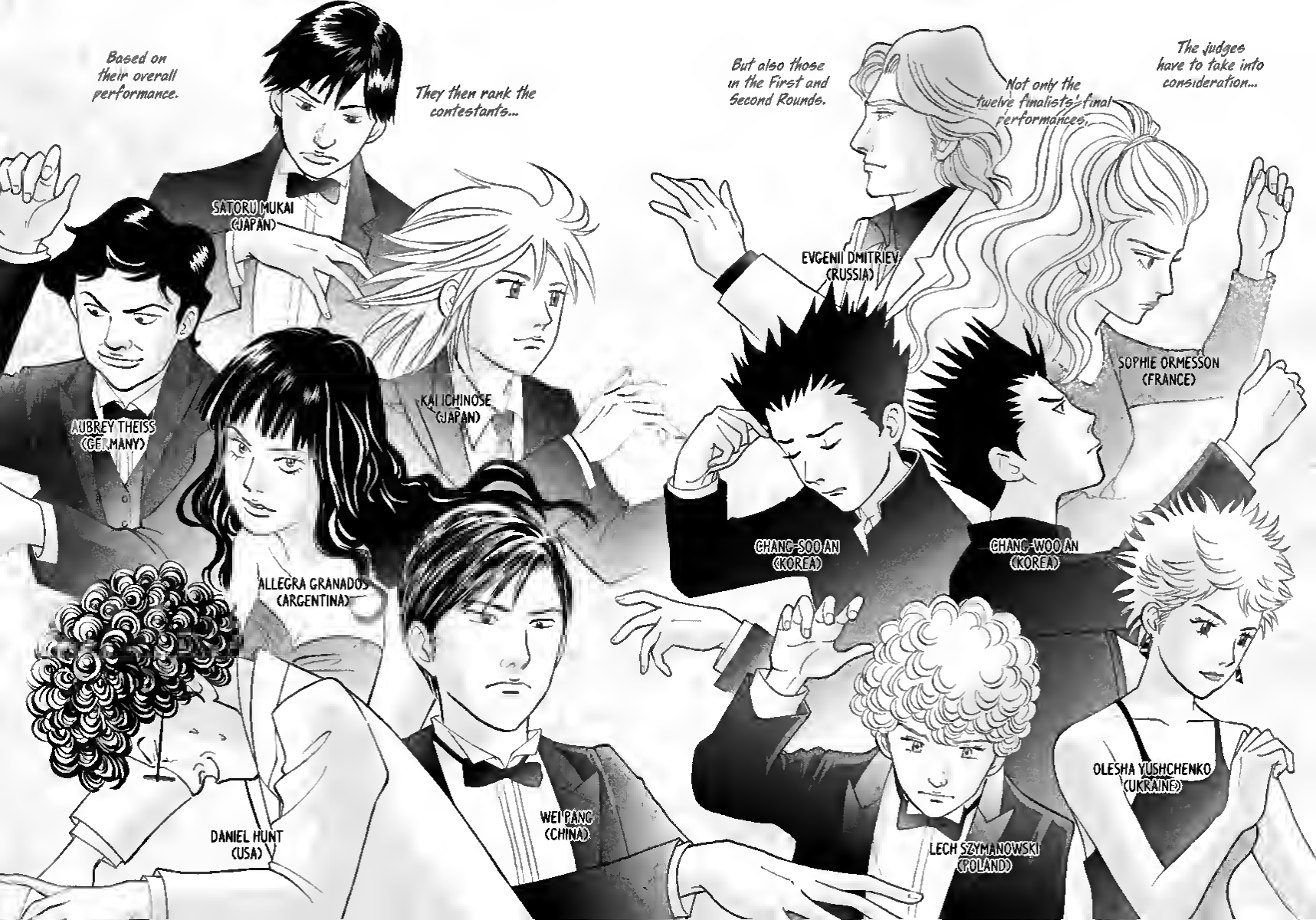

Oh? No way! Isn't that Adamski?!
Simon Hausner is also there!

What to do?! I just can't make up my mind!
This one-hour grace period simply isn't enough!

Patter
Patter
Patter
What a relief. So I'm not the last to arrive.
.....
Chairman Jasiński!
Chairman!
Chairman!

That's everyone...
It's time. Shall we begin?
Ah... Sure.
Clatter Clatter

I believe everyone has already made up their mind.
Please write down the ranking and awardees of your choice, as per our prior consensus.
This...is hard...
. . .
Argh... I still can't decide how to arrange the top three places..
The method of the final adjudication is completely different from those used in the previous rounds.


Based on their overall performance.
They then rank the contestants...
But also those in the First and Second Rounds.
Not only the twelve finalists' final performances,
The judges have to take into consideration...
SATORU MUKAI (JAPAN)
AUBREY THEISS (GERMANY)
KAI ICHINOSE (JAPAN)
EVGENII DMITRIEV (RUSSIA)
SOPHIE ORMESSON (FRANCE)
ALLEGRA GRANADOS (ARGENTINA)
CHANG-SOO AN (KOREA)
CHANG-WOO AN (KOREA)
DANIEL HUNT (USA)
WEI PANG (CHINA)
LECH SZYMANOWSKI (POLAND)
OLESHA YUSHCHENKO (UKRAINE)

Such is the method we have adopted.

And the contestant with the lowest average point is the winner!

The total points are then divided by the number of judges...

And the one in twelfth place gets 12 points.

Then the one in first place gets 1 point, the one in second place gets 2 points, the one in third place gets 3 points, etc.

It is also acceptable to leave first place unawarded and put two contestants in second place.

Chairman Jasiński presented us with a project proposal.
In the meeting before the start of the Finals...
There is a reason why this judging method was adopted.
Well... It is a common idea for a project at a time like this.
It hardly comes as a sho
What... What's this?
Mutter
We have been asked to publicize our score sheets for this round in a magazine.

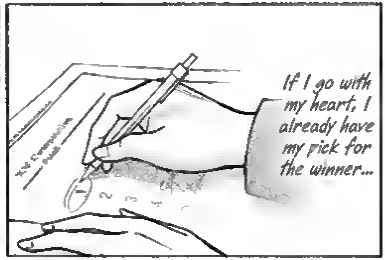
Of course. Who'd be worried about that?
It is no couse for worry.
It does not motter whether the scores ore mode public. Either way, it would be nothing more thon on entertoining article.
Are you kidding me...?
However, this time, I believe it would be o good ideo...
To carry out the adsudicotion without our usuol anonymity.
Pardon?!

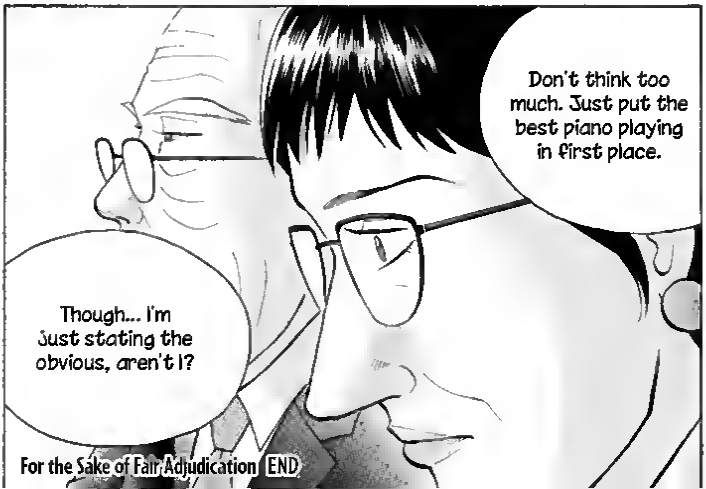
I have utter faith in our adjudication...
So there shouldn't be any problem, I hope?
In which case, the score sheets of the contestants...
Will list out all our names,
Along with the score given by each of us.
Holy shit...
No one has a problem with this arrangement, right?
We should have confidence in our own judgment, after all!

I would like everyone to choose between two options as to which method we will adopt this time.
Now, there is another matter I wish to discuss regarding the adjudication of the Final Round.
Either we do as we have always done...We rank the contestants by their scores in the Final Round...
Or, I propose that this time...
We rank them by the total score of their performances in the First, Second, and Final Rounds
This way, it will be simple and easy to understand if the scores are ever publicized...
And we will save ourselves a lot of explaining.

I'm totally against it!
If no one opposes...
Ranking them by the total score accumulated from the First Round, huh...
If...If they ever get published...
If...the scores are really publicized...
My career will forever be stained by the mistakes I made when judging the first two rounds...
Excuse me, Chairman,
Since we would only be assigning ranks to the contestants with this method, we could simply add the total points of the first two rounds to the points in the Finals without differentiating them
Huh?
Phew
Ah...
So how about we leave the scores for the first two rounds undisclosed?

Ahh... You have a point! That's a good idea.
In the end, the current method was chosen by unanimous vote.
Then we will decide with a vote.
At the end of the day, the pleasure offsets whatever misery or fatigue I've experienced.
It is thrilling and exciting to determine the ranking of the contestants based on one's own judgment...





For the Sake of Fair Adjudication END

Artwork from "Gu...rding".

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PIANO NO MORI

by ISSHIKI Makoto
一色まこと

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Piano no Mori ch 229

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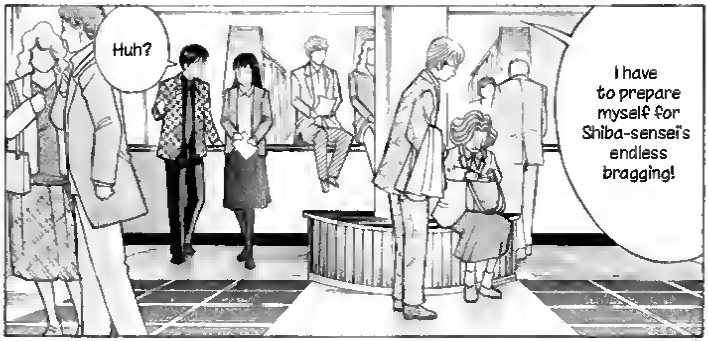
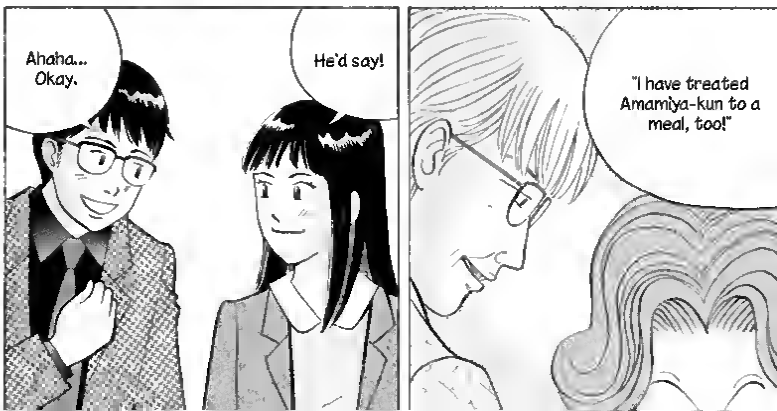
Chapter 229 The Best Piano Playing

I wanted to, so don't worry about it!
Ah! But...
Don't be. I should actually be thanking you for the treat...
Sorry for dragging you along to dinner.


Huh?
I have to prepare myself for Shiba-sensei's endless bragging!


Ahaha... Okay.
He'd say!
"I have treated Amamiya-kun to a meal, too!"

Yeah. Let's wait a little longer...
Ah... We should get back in there!
Bustle
Bustle
I'd like to say that I don't care about the ranking at all...
But I'm sa nervaus my knees are practically knacking together.
Thaugh I don't really fancy charging into that mab right naw...
The winner will be Kai Ichinose.
Second place and third place will be unawarded. In fourth place will be Wei Pang.
I wander haw it'll turn out.
I get you.

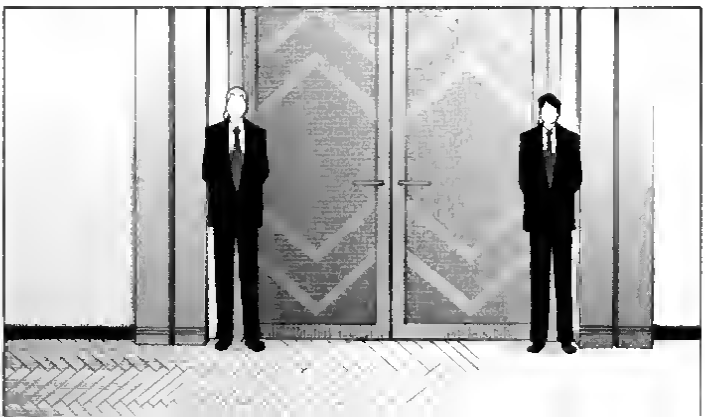
He didn't change his mind even after listening to his No. 1.
But Dad was absolutely certain that Kai wouldn't win.
I know, right?
Haha! That would be wonderful!
Though there's also the possibility that Lech Szymanowski wins, to everyone's surprise.
The winner will be Wei Pang.
Second place will be either Theiss or Granados...
No... I don't believe that...
You'd say Kai has no chance of winning, right?
I understand, though.
Ah... Please don't include this in your report!
Those are just speculations, after all...

My, my...
Shiba-chan is terrible at taking care of women...
Don't worry! Calm down and we'll look for it together.
But I swear I put it in here...
Cell phone Cell phone
...

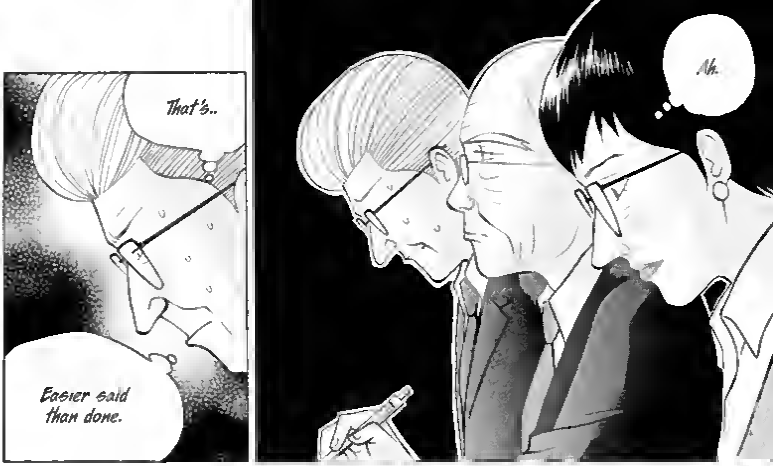
*T/N: THIS IS A PUN ON KAI'S NAME. "ICHINOSE KAI" READS IDENTICAL TO "ICHI (NUMBER ONE) NO (OF) SEKAI (THE WORLD)". SHUFFLE THE ORDER INTO "SEKAI ICHI NO" AND ADD "PIANIST", AND YOU GET "BEST PIANIST IN THE WORLD".

Ahaha... Come on! You don't have to be that shocked!
I...I didn't!

I never noticed either!
Pretty interesting though, isn't it?
It's just something Shiba-sensei came across on the internet.



My advice would be...
Don't think too much. Just put the best piano playing in first place.
Though... I'm just stating the obvious, aren't I?


That's..
Easier said than done.
Ah.

5
6
7
Wei Pong
I could simply rank everyone who's a threat to Szymanowski somewhere below him while keeping it reasonable.
It would be fairly simple if we were doing this anonymously...
Lech Szymanowski

I will forever be marked as a cheat. My entire career and my achievements as a musician will all...
But if this really gets publicized, I probably won't get a seat on the board ever again.

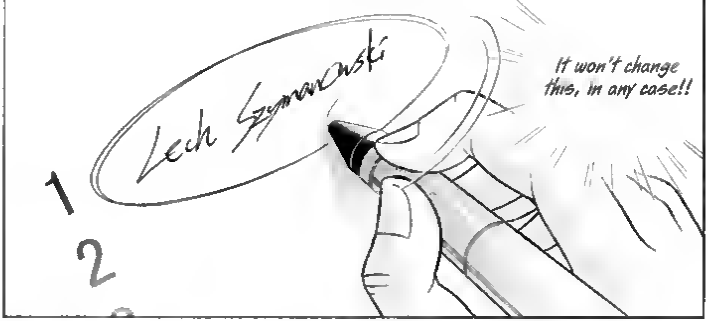
B...Back then...
Go down the drain...
Mr. Kong!
They've decided to publicize the scores?
Yes, they made the decision just now.
That's good!
What's the problem?

B...But Pang's piana playing is a bit taa different fram Poland's Chapin...
If nathing gaes amiss,
It's all but decided that Wei Pang is the winner this time!
Publicizing the details would serve to tell the world that he won fair and square.
Humph
Well, no... That's not exactly the case...
It might just be because af the playing sequence...
Is that the consensus among all the judges?
I'm all far publicizing the scares!
Yau Palish judges will be all caught red-handed at favoring Szymanowski!!
Dan't think I dan't knaw yau want your awn Lech Szymanawski ta win.
But even an amateur can tell Pang's perfarmance was way better than his!

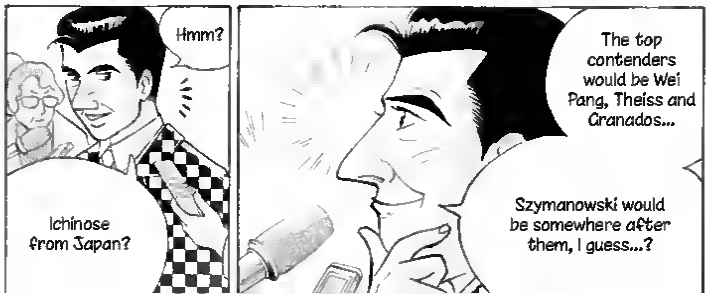
Piotr!
STARTLE
Mr...
Mr. Kong!
Don't forget! My country is the biggest sponsor of the competition!
You'd really better not offend us!
B...But if Szymonowski doesn't win...
It's not yet decided whether the score sheets will be publicized!
If you give that away to outsiders...
Whot... What is it?
It's you, Andrzej...
You gave me quite a start.

NOT AT ALL!!
I DON'T CONSIDER SUCH THINGS WHEN EVALUATING THE PERFORMANCES!
Then Karol Adamski's elimination would have been for nothing...
You mean?
NO...
Is...Is that how you think of me?
If that's what you think...
I see.
That's a relief.
You didn't disappaint me.
No... I respect you as an outstanding musician.
At the same time, I believe that you are one of the many great pedagogues who point the way for young musicians.

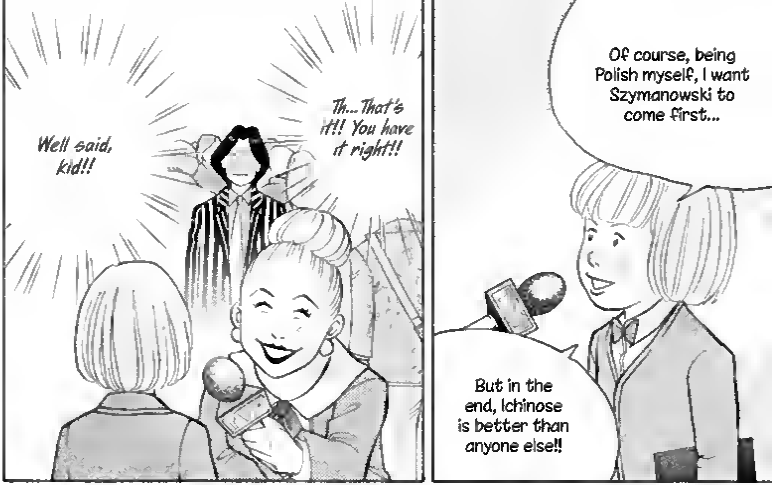
As long as we regard the contestants' music with sincerity...
The answer will come to us of its own accord.
However... I don't understand why you are so flustered.
Whether the score sheets are publicized should not have any effect on the result,
Isn't that right?
That's exactly right! It won't change anything!!


Lech Szymanowski
It won't change this, in any case!!
1
2

ガヤ
ガヤ
ガヤ

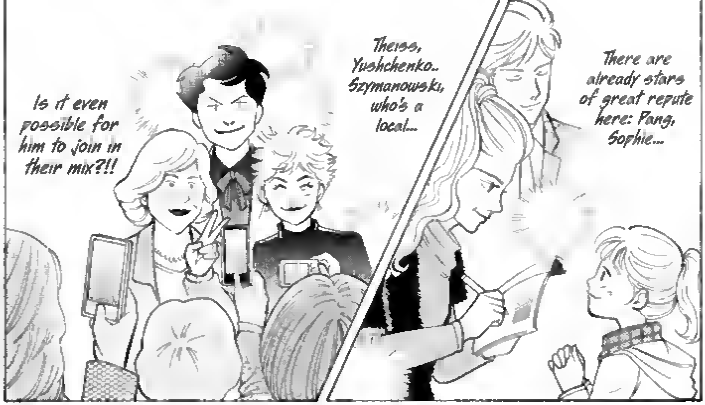

Hmm?
Ichinose from Japan?
The top contenders would be Wei Pang, Theiss and Granados...
Szymanowski would be somewhere after them, I guess...?

How the judges evaluate Ichinose's performance... is something we should all watch out for!
I wonder if they are even capable of doing that, you know?
Huh? Ichinose?
He's a special case.
I'd even go so far as to say that he's in a class completely of his own.
Do you think his music could possibly be given a rank?!
If I were a judge,
I'd definitely give him the "Best Performance of a Concerto"!
At best, they would probably make do with giving him a special award or something.
That's absolutely...
I'd say Ichinose!
Kai Ichinose is the best!!
Don't tell me... Will Ichinose's piano playing be dismissed for being "out of the norm" even here?!
Shut it! Shut it! Shut it!
Just shut it, you shitty critics!!


Well said, kid!!
Th... That's it!! You have it right!!
Of course, being Polish myself, I want Szymanowski to come first...
But in the end, Ichinose is better than anyone else!!

However, there is no precedent for a winner as young as seventeen.
He's exactly right. Ichinose's playing is better than anyone else's!!

Not a single one of them could make it big in Poland!
Besides, there are lots of Japanese musicians who are extremely famous within my circles... but practically unknown to the rest of the world


Is it even possible for him to join in their mix?!!
Theiss, Yushchenko, Szymanowski, who's a local...
There are already stars of great repute here: Pang, Sophie...

Judging by the performances...
Still...

In the First... Second... and Final Rounds alone...
No one could surpass Ichinose!!!

I'm going to trust my own sensitivity...
And put what I believe is the best piano playing in first place!
That's right.
There's no reason to hesitate.
What matters is how he has lived his life!!
1 Kai Ichinose
2
Age isn't the issue here, is it?!
What matters is how they approach the piano!!
Age is irrelevant!!
And adults who take lessons in their 30s when they don't even want to!
Well, guess I'll go with this..
1 Wei Pang
2 Kai Ichinose
3
4
But there are plenty of people who still act like kids even though they're adults,
This kid is only 17...
Tap
Tap
If I...

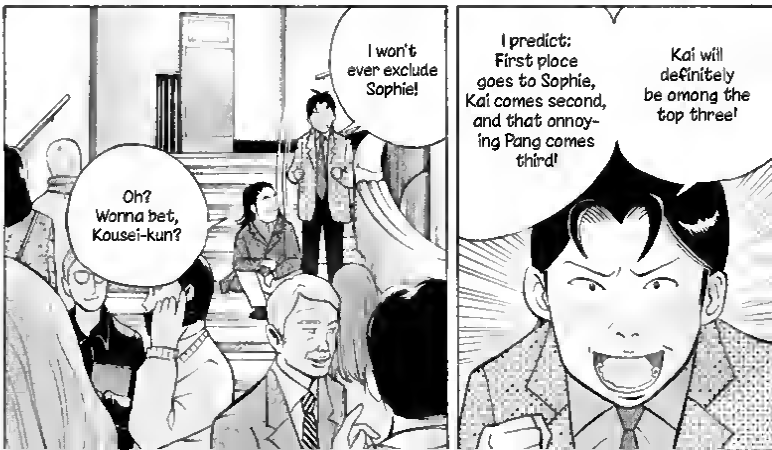
1 Wei Pang
2 Allegra Grando
3 Aubrey Theil
4 Lech Szym
Chang Wa
Soter
Chan
But can I really live with that?!
He's the black sheep in this flock...
It'd be all too easy to cut off this peculiarity...
Hmm...
I've ranked everyone except Ichinose.
Just put the best piano playing...
Don't think too much.
1 Lech Szymanow
2 Wei Pang
3 Aubrey Th
....
In first place!
CROSS
1 Lech Szy
2 Wei Pa
Aubrey Theil

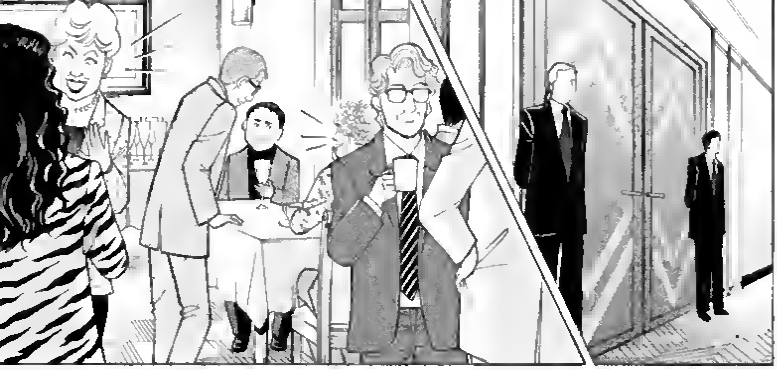
CRINKLE
Too much...
Too much...
Don't think...
Here!
There are plenty of sheets here.
Oh! Thanks.
Rustle Rustle

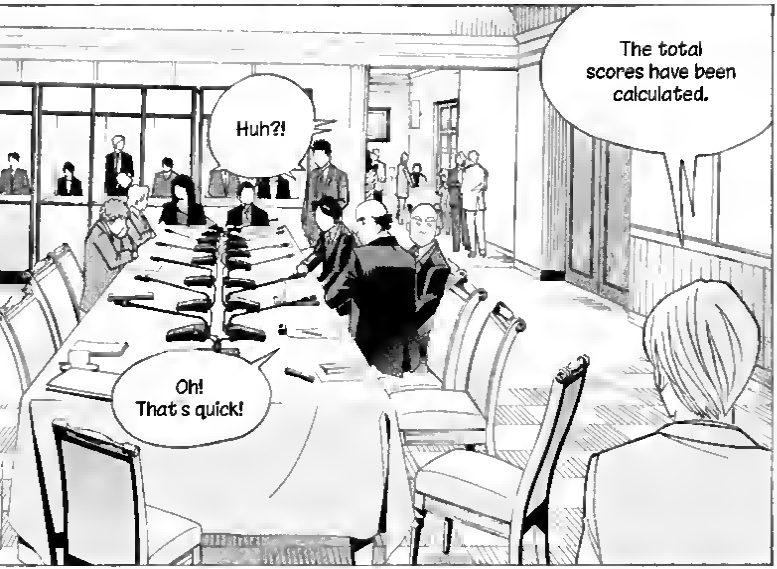
As long as I regard the contestants' music with sincerity...
The answer will come to me...
1
2
3
Scratch
Of its own accord!

Theiss will come first, Wei Pang second, and Ichinose third.
My guess is that...
And I do hope Ichinose will come third!
Theiss is simply my favorite.
Though I'd be happy enough if he managed to be among the top six...

Sorry, but you have it completely wrong.
But he'll win a special award, that's for sure!
Is it even possible to evaluate it along with the other performances?
His playing is simply too out of this world...


I won't ever exclude Sophie!
Oh? Wanna bet, Kousei-kun?
I predict: First place goes to Sophie, Kai comes second, and that annoying Pang comes third!
Kai will definitely be among the top three!




The total scores have been calculated.
Huh?!
Oh! That s quick!

FLASH
What?

Th...
This is...

Artwork from "Song of the Long March"

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PIANO NO MORI

by ISSHIKI Makoto
一色まこと

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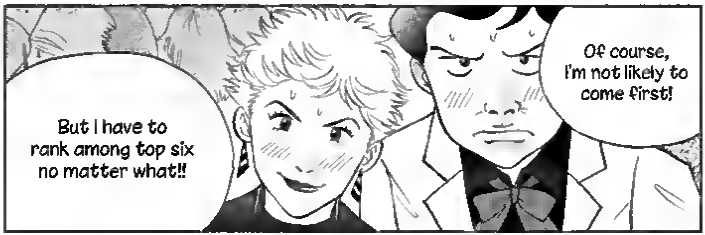
Chapter 230

Hero

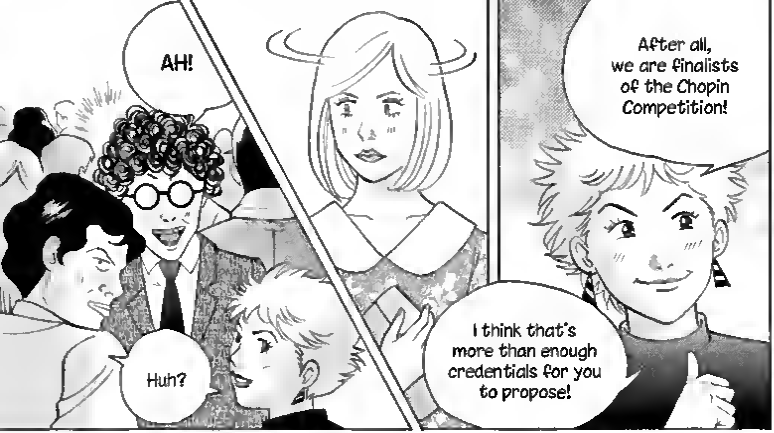
Th...
Hmm.
This... seems to call for another vote, doesn't it?
That does seem to be the case!
Ah...
This is...

Let me win!
Let me win!!


But I have to rank among top six no matter what!!
Of course, I'm not likely to come first!

Y...You're being scary, Daniel.
RUMBLE
We get you, but you don't have to be so hard on yourself...

I've sworn never to propose to Sarah if I don't win something!


AH!
Huh?
After all, we are finalists of the Chopin Competition!
I think that's more than enough credentials for you to propose!

Uhhhhh...

Daniel ♡
SARAH!! ♡

Sign, please ♡
O... Okay
Huhhh...

WHOA!
Loom

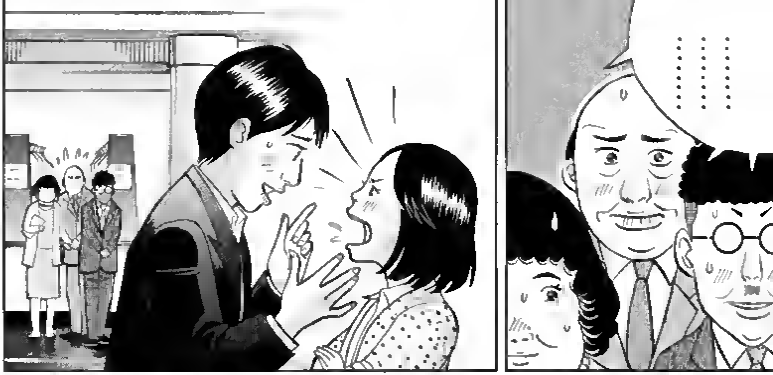
Excuse me, but could you please look over here again?

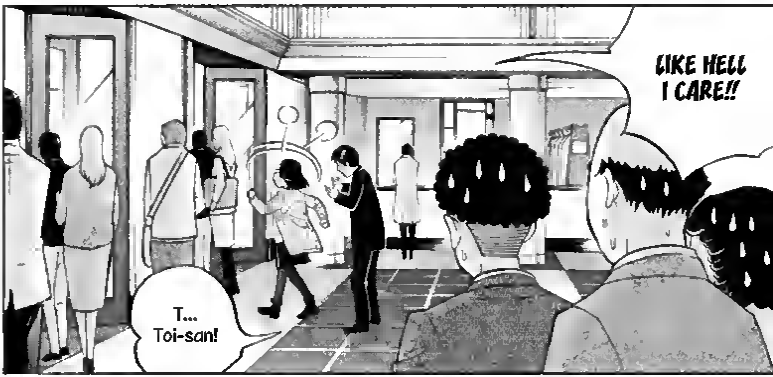
Sorry! I absolutely had to see Amelia for myself...
For Heaven's sake... You really had us worried.
Dashing out the moment you finished playing like that... Without even letting us know...

I really am a terrible father, aren't I?
Huh?

No... Lech didn't do anything wrong.
It should've been obvious where he'd gone off to if we had just used our heads a little...

Yeah.
I guess...
Not to mention... You dashed over to visit her first thing afterward.
I'm sure Amelia is overjoyed...
That she gets to listen to the best performance you have ever given...
.....
Kyaaaaa
Kyaaaaa
Dammit, Wei Pang!
Screw off!
Mouth Mouth
Kya
Kya
Kousei-kun, I dare you to speak up.




LIKE HELL I CARE!!
T... Toi-san!

I...I was going to introduce her... Sorry.
Looks like she's angry about something.

Weren't you gonna introduce Mukai-kun to us?
What's wrong, Aoi?!
Sulk
He says he won't be a pianist, that he's gonna be a piano tuner!!
Humph
Who cares about that guy?!
Are you crazy?! It's still too early to say, Aoi!!
Seriously... He's soooo stupid!
That's right! He's a finalist!! This is such a waste!!
You're kidding, right? Even though you finally got the pianist boyfriend that you've always wanted?!
HUH ???!
I know, right?! He's the worst!

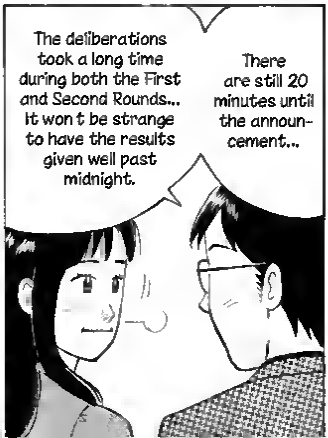
That's not true at all... But I can do without that cheapskate. There are other guys.
Seriously, why are you even so popular...
W...Well... Aoi is popular with guys, so she's fierce...
There are other pianists. It's not like he's the only one...
Even in this lobby alone...
But isn't he too young for me? Shuhei, huh...
Ah... Him...
Age isn't an issue these days!
No way!! Amamiya Shuhei?!
Then... why not go for that thoroughbred?
Like... Ichinose Kai?
Huh??
Th... Then... why not go for an even bigger catch?

Squeal
Squeal
Squeal
KYAAAAAAA♡
No!! Don't take him!!

Kyaaa
Maybe they're announcing the result already?!
No... That's not it!

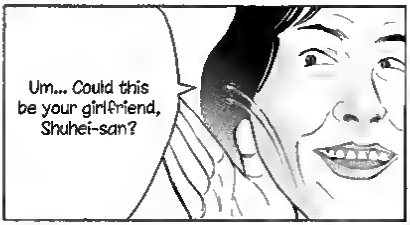
Haha... It's really lively in there.

WHOA!
Loom
Sign, please ♡


The deliberations took a long time during both the First and Second Rounds... It won't be strange to have the results given well past midnight.
There are still 20 minutes until the announcement...

Scribble
Scribble

I've always been a fan of your father... I've also become a fan of yours this time, Shuhei-san!
Th...Thank you very much.


Um... Could this be your girlfriend, Shuhei-san?

O...Of course not! You're mistaken...!
There's no way... I could be good enough for her...

FLUSH

Huh?

Smooch
Smooch
Women of her age always make assumptions whenever they see a boy and a girl together...
My mother is like that, too...
Please don't let it bother you!
So sorry!
Huh?
It's an honor to be mistaken for your girlfriend.
I'm not bothered at all!
What?
In five years' time...
Hey, Amamiya-kun. Let's come here again!

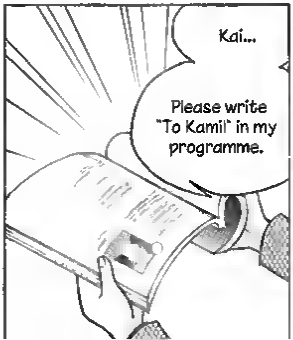
Won't that be nice?
Promise me.
It will be a challenge for me!
And vengeance for you, Amamiya-kun!
You won't say no, will you?
Together... in five years' time...!
Indeed! Indeed! Please say yes!! It would be a huge shot in the arm for both of them if they take on the competition together!!
Such beautiful friendship!

Takaka-san, it's Kai!
Yay!!
Wow!!
Huh?
That really caught me off guard.
Participating in the Chopin Competition... again...? Me...?!
I've never even thought about that...
Ahaha! He's being surrounded by children again.
Kai!

My, my...
Looks like he's swarmed by kids again.

It won't be easy... getting him out of that...
What to do?
Haha

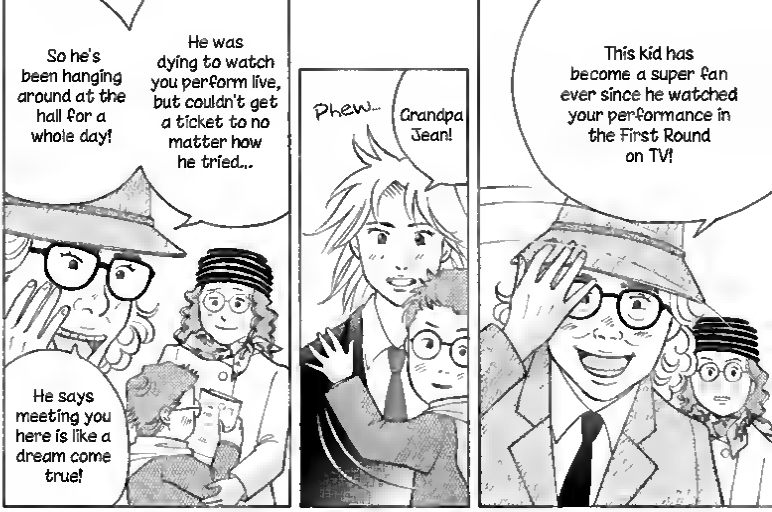
After all, Kai is their hero.

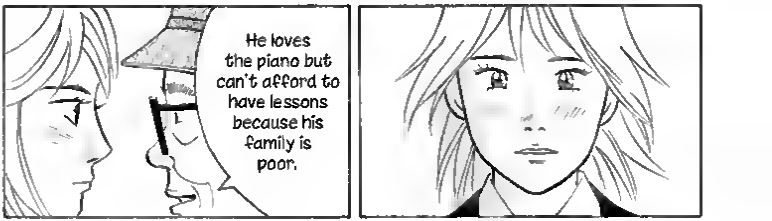

Kai...
Please write "To Kamil" in my programme.

Kamil!
Slacken
Hi, Kai.
And I want to shake hands with you.
Hi, Kamil.
And I want to hug you real tight.

Huh?
Glomp

What should I do? This is bad. I don't understand Polish...
What...
K... Kamil's mum?

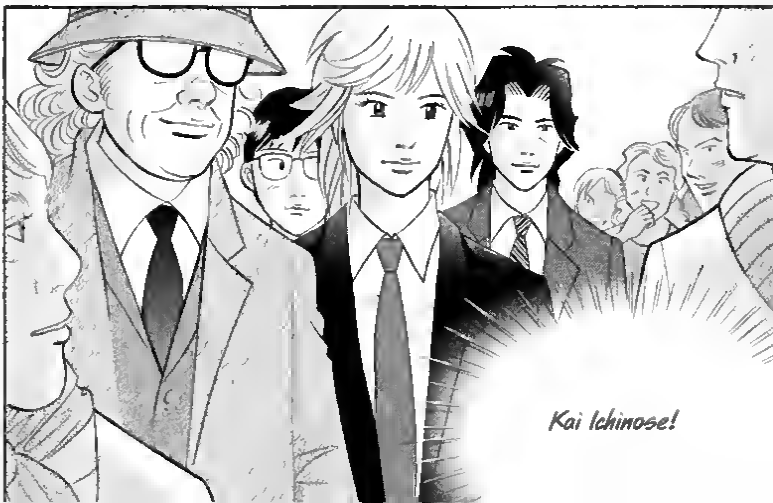

So he's been hanging around at the hall for a whole day!
He was dying to watch you perform live, but couldn't get a ticket to no matter how he tried...
He says meeting you here is like a dream come true!
Phew...
Grandpa Jean!
This kid has become a super fan ever since he watched your performance in the First Round on TV!


He loves the piano but can't afford to have lessons because his family is poor.

Hey, Grandpa Jean!
What's this? What did you say to him?
Well... I told him you won't lose because you have his support...
And that you'll play the piano for him live some day...
Heheh
Ahaha! Got it!
Music is wonderful, isn't it?!
It brings people happiness!
Yeah.
Hey, Amamiya-kun.
Huh?
Ah!
Haha... Well said.
In that case, Takaka-san, let's calmly look forward to the result!
In the end, ranks and scores really don't matter!
One shouldn't mind such things too much...

Ahaha!
Kaaaaai!
I came!!
Ahaha!
HUHHHH...
NO WAAAAAY!!
IS THAT YOU,
TAKAKO?!!

Hey!
Oh!
Huh?

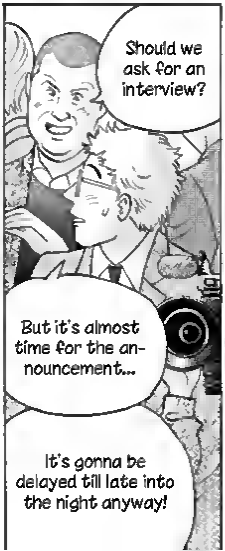

Kai Ichinose!

ザ
ザ
It's Ichinose!
It's Ichinose!!

The bustling crowd...
This is amazing.
This...
Is parting to make way for Kai!

Huh?
Hey, wait up!
FLASH
FLASH
FLASH
YOU'VE GOTTA BE KIDDING! SERIOUSLY?!

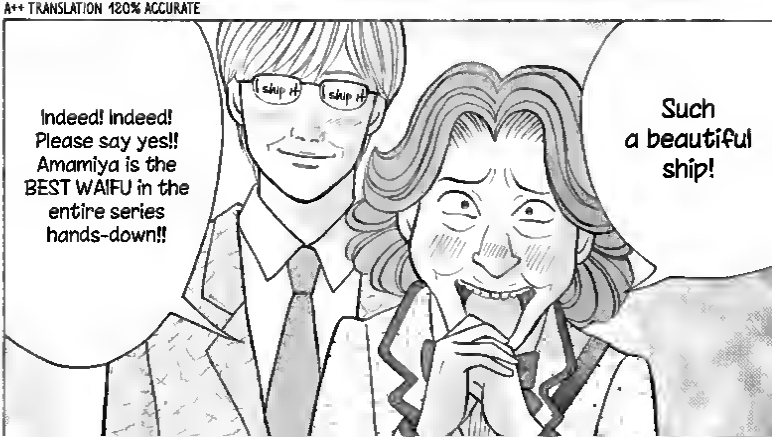
We need to get some good shots. Let's go!
Not good! It's so crowded I can't even move!


Should we ask for an interview?
But it's almost time for the announcement...
It's gonna be delayed till late into the night anyway!

FLASH
FLASH
FLASH

WHOAAAA!!! THE JUDGES ARE COMING DOWN!
IT'S TIME TO ANNOUNCE THE RESULT!!!
Hero END

A++ TRANSLATION 120% ACCURATE


ship it
ship it
Indeed! Indeed! Please say yes!! Amamiya is the BEST WAIFU in the entire series hands-down!!
Such a beautiful ship!

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PIANO NO MORI

by ISSHIKI Makoto
一色まこと

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Piano no Mori ch 231

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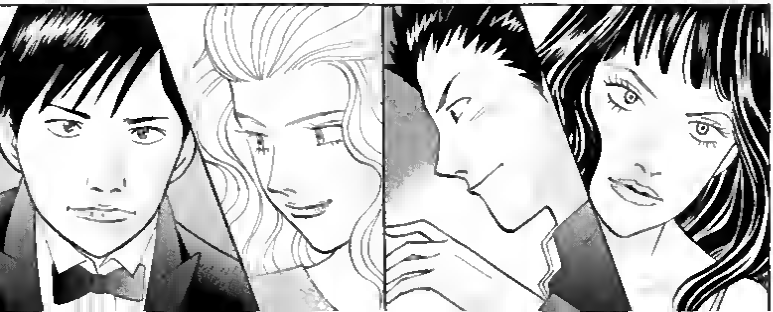
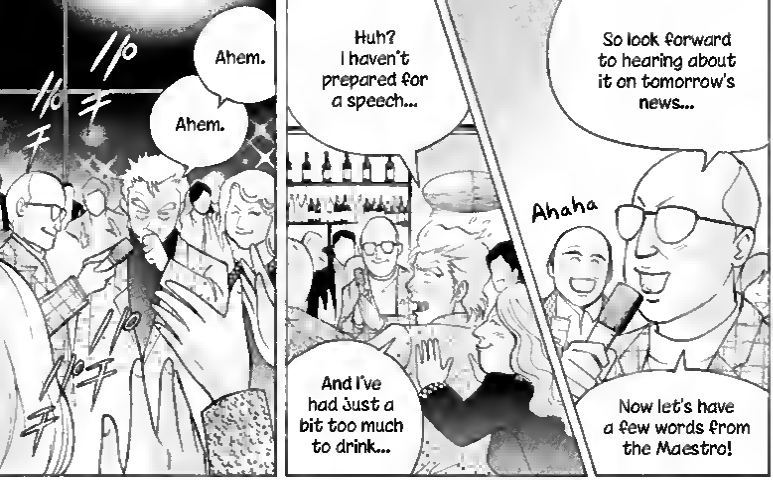
Chapter 231 Announcement of the Final Result (1)



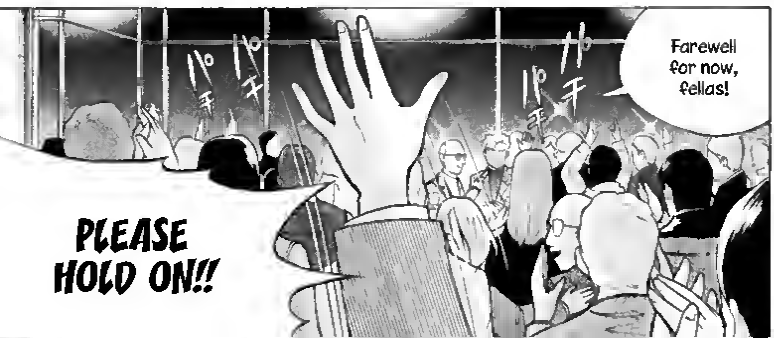
SOFITEL
To us, who will forever be the Philharmonic Orchestra...
And to the Chopin Competition...

CHEERS!!!

CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
Well then, everyone! It's time we wrapped things up with this final toast!!
Much as you want to find out about the final result, the judging will most probably go overtime...
AHAHA


Ahem.
Ahem.
Huh? I haven't prepared for a speech...
So look forward to hearing about it on tomorrow's news...
Ahaha
And I've had just a bit too much to drink...
Now let's have a few words from the Maestro!

Uh... Thank you very much for your hard work!!
We'll be accompanying the winner on an international tour afterwards, so please keep up your skills and stamina... I'll be counting on you!


Farewell for now, fellas!
PLEASE HOLD ON!!

They're announcing the result already!
They're on time?
...That's to say...
Kyaa
The judges are entering the lobby... right now!!
What?!
The adjudication went smoothly?!

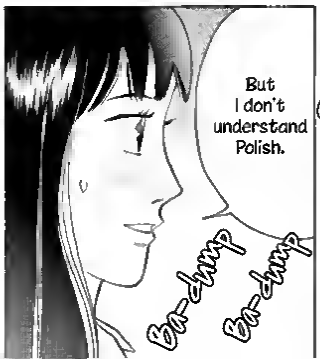
FLASH
FLASH
FLASH
HUH? THEY'RE ANNOUNCING IT ALREADY?!
NO WAY!!
THEY'RE ON TIME!!
HURRY!!

FLASH
FLASH
At long last!!
At...

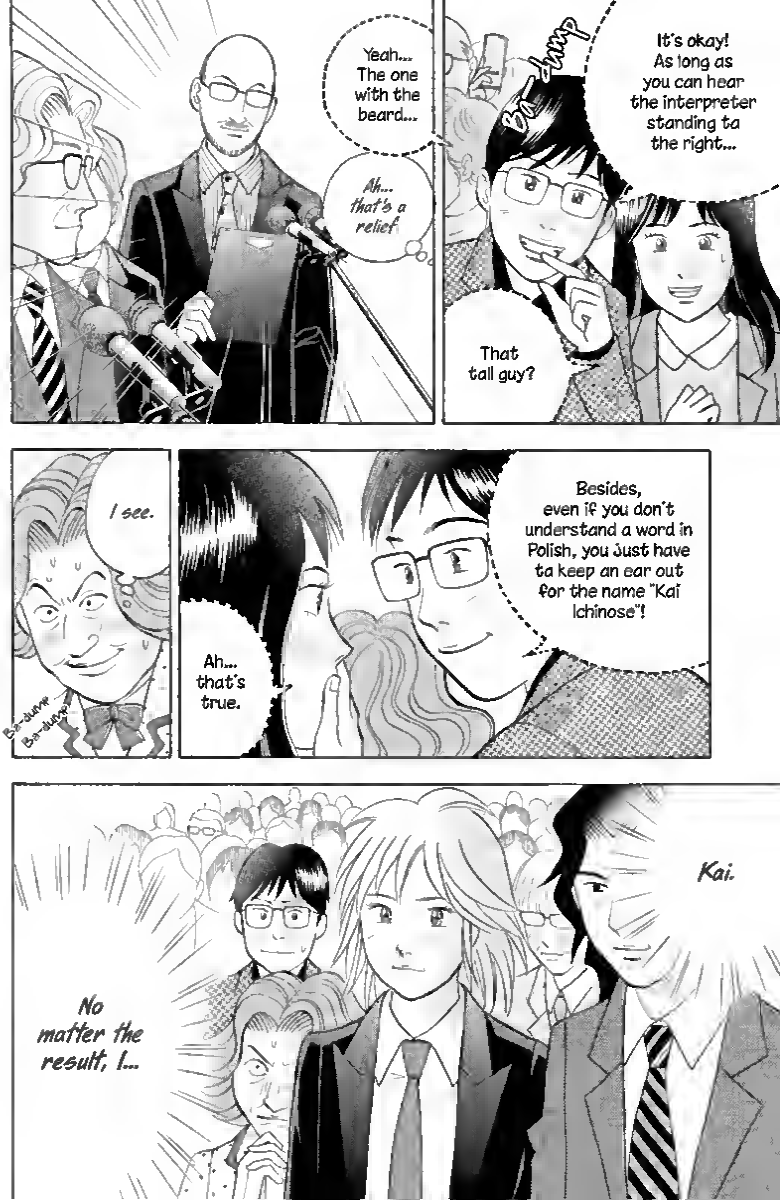
My heart is hopping right out of my chest!!
Ba-dump
Ba-dump
Ba-dump
Ba-dump
I'm even more agitated than when I was waiting for my own result.
It's starting finally.
Ba-dump
Ba-dump
Ba-dump
Kai!
Ba-dump
On that piece of paper...
On that piece of paper are the words that will decide Kai's fate!!

Um... Ladies and gentlemen, sorry to have kept you waiting!!
But now we are ready to announce the result of the final adjudication.

The result will only be read once...
You may confirm it on the screen afterwards...


But I don't understand Polish.
Ba-dump
Ba-dump

Ba-dump
Ba-dump
Huh...? So they're announcing the result straight away?
Yeah, so make sure you don't miss a word!!


Yeah... The one with the beard...
Ah... that's a relief
Ba-dump
It's okay! As long as you can hear the interpreter standing to the right...
That tall guy?
I see.
Ba-dump Ba-dump
Ah... that's true.
Besides, even if you don't understand a word in Polish, you just have to keep an ear out for the name "Kai Ichinose"!
No matter the result, I...
Kai.

By announcing the winners of the special prizes
Now, let's begin

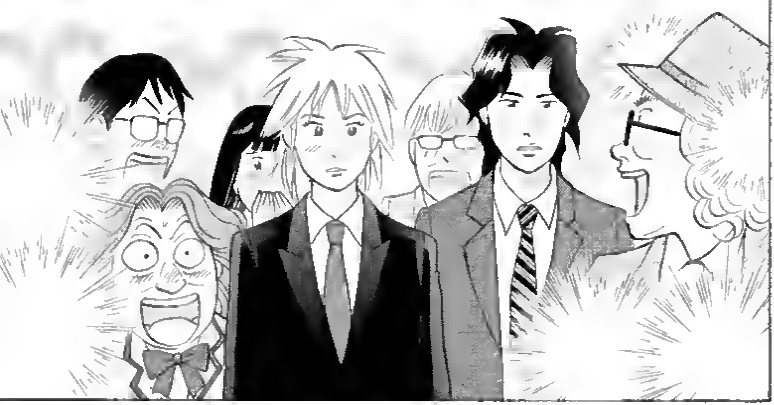
BA-DUMP
BA-DUMP
My heart's gonna give out.
I...I can't take it.
BA-DUMP

BA-DUMP
Maybe I'm dying.
The Prize for the Best Performance of a Polonaise...
BA-DUMP

Wei Pang
FLASH
FLASH
Bingo! Got that right!!
Hmm. No surprises there.

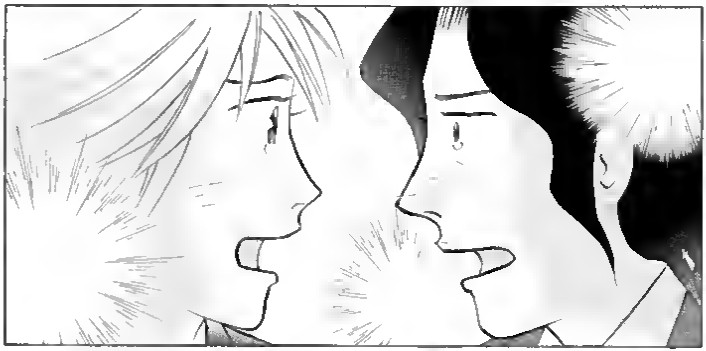
That would be me, right?
BA-DUMP
The Prize for the Best Performance of a Mazurka.
BA-DUMP
BA-DUMP
BA-DUMP
This is too much for me. Just get it over with!!!
Each second feels like a hundred to me!
BA-DUMP

Kai Ichinose.



YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY, ICHINOSE!!
Th... Th... The first Japanese to have ever won the Mazurka Prize is...
I'd hoped you'd get the next prize, but this isn't so bad either!!
BINGO AGAIN!!
Your predictions are spot-on, sir!
HAVE THE GODS SMACKED THE JUDGES IN THE HEAD OR SOMETHING?!
ROF
Ichinose...
The Prize for the Best Performance of a Concerto...
Next one, then.
....

Kai Ichinose.



The Prize for the Best Performance of a Sonata ..
Oh earth...

What...

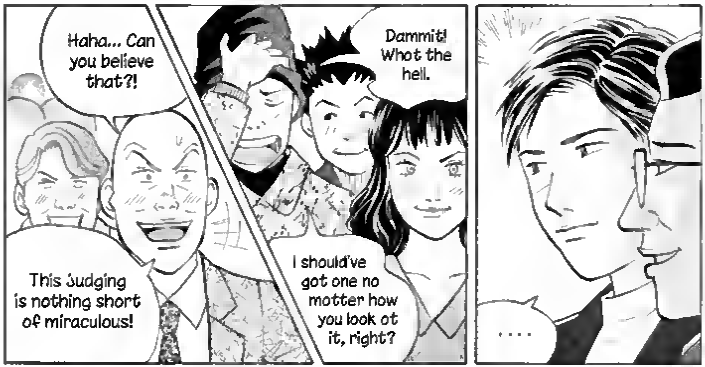
kyaaa
Kai Ichinose.

MAESTRO!!
ICHINOSE ALSO WON THE SONATA PRIZE!!
WHAT?!!
MAESTRO!!
ICHINOSE WON THE CONCERTO PRIZE!!
Well, of course he did!
And they always say the Mazurka Prize is rigged. Good thing it isn't true!

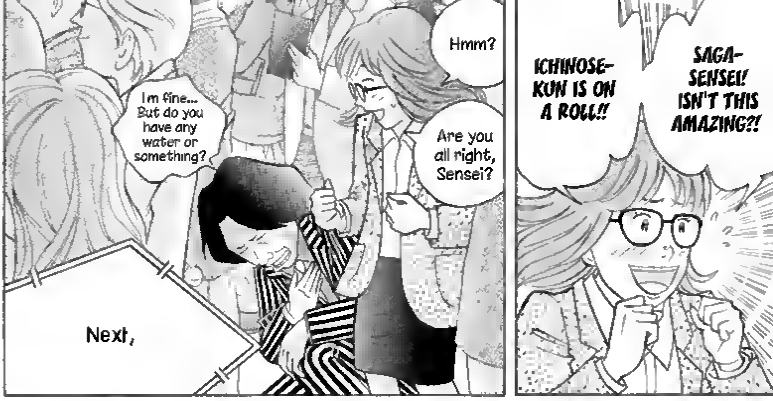
How...
How did this happen?!

It hardly matters as long as this isn't a dream!!
But who cares?!

Our dear Kai...
Won three prizes!!!


Haha... Can you believe that?!
This judging is nothing short of miraculous!
Dammit! What the hell.
I should've got one no matter how you look at it, right?
....

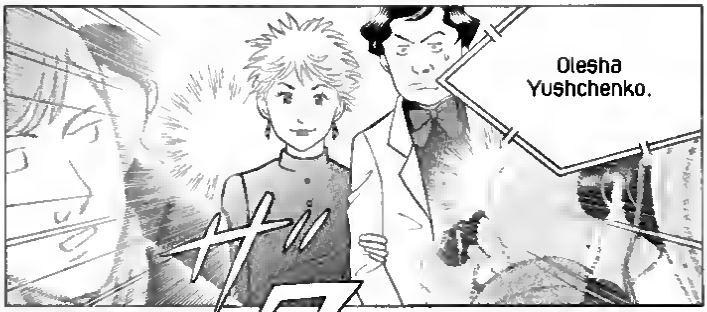
Don't tell me...
This means Ichinose isn't among the top six? That can't be right.
Who knows.
Still, the result has been fair so far!


Hmm?
Are you all right, Sensei?
I'm fine... But do you have any water or something?
Next,
ICHINOSE-KUN IS ON A ROLL!!
SAGA-SENSEI! ISN'T THIS AMAZING?!

While the following finalists are sadly not able to win any prizes...
They will always carry the honor of being finalists. Their names will now be read in alphabetical order

Nobody would want to hear their name right now.
But Kai will be fine!
He's gonna read out the six contestants who aren't among the top six.
Huh? What is it now?

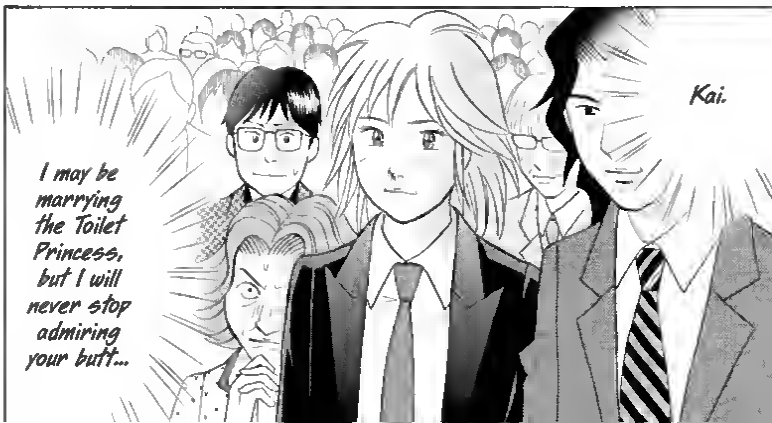
BA-DUMP
BA-DUMP
BA-DUMP
Don't you dare.
Say my name and I'll kill you! Say my name and I'll kill you! I'll kill you! I'll kill you!
BA-DUMP
But then again, anything can happen here in Poland...
They won't say Kai's name... hopefully.
Chang-Soo An.
Evgenii Dmitriev
No way...
Chang-Woo An.



Announcement of the Final Result (1) END

Yeah... I'm gonna grow a beard just like his...
He does kinda look like a middle-aged Amamiya.
Ba-dump
You see that guy over there?
That tall guy?

Just kiss.
Ba-dump Ba-dump
I actually think he's hotter than you.
Will you still marry me if I look like that in 30 years?


Kai.
I may be marrying the Toilet Princess, but I will never stop admiring your butt...

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PIANO NO MORI

by ISSHIKI Makoto
一色まこと

Piano no Mori ch 232

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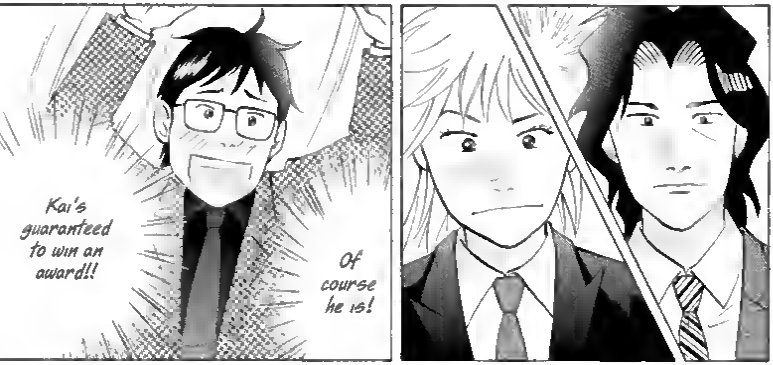
Chapter 232 Announcement of the Final Result (2)

Congratulations, Aubrey!
Sorry, but seems like I won't be touring the world with you.
Olesha...
D... DANIEL?!
DANIEL!!
Flop
ACK!
Sway
Chang-Woo...
Ugh... Chang-Woo...
Hic
Hic
Are you okay, Chang-Woo?

Kai is among the top six!!!
K...
S... Sousuke ...
Kai...


Kai's guaranteed to win an award!!
Of course he is!

HE DID IT!! HE DID IT!!
KAI WON AN AWARD!!

He won the Mazurka Prize, the Concerto Prize and the Sonata Prize, after all!
Jan...
That's only to be expected, Wojew!
What the... So you came after all, Jan...
Ah! The whole gang is here...
I heard from Jean that you don't need a ticket to watch the results being announced.
A...Are you all right, sir?
Sighhh
Good thing it was not a case of "giving-him-three-special-prizes-is-already-enough" ...
Ichinose snatched an award!
I actually came because I wanted to be here to comfort him...
But I'm so glad I'm here to congratulate him instead!

Yushchenko... is out.
Well... That just shows how high the level is for this year's competition.

Ichinose is among the top six.
What if he... by any chance...
Humph. I wonder.
Let's see if those judges are gonna show their true colors.

Just look at them. Every single one of them looks rotten.
It won't surprise me if there's a secret deal behind the whole thing!
And now we shall announce the award winners

The sixth prize goes to .
Still... Let's see this to the end, no matter how it turns out!
Ba-dump
Ba-dump
Is it coming ?!
Is the moment finally coming?!
Ba-dump
Ba-dump

Sophie Ormesson.
FLASH
FLASH
CLAMOR
S...So Ichinose actually stands a...?
Not likely.
Arghhhh. She only got sixth...

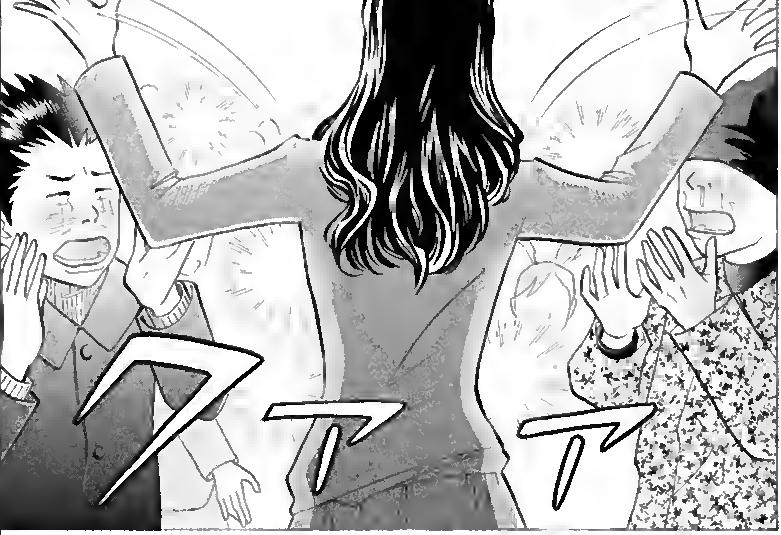
Pang is actually worthy of first place!
The biggest sponsor for this year's competition is China!
Just think about it.
On top of that...
.....
.....
Do you think they'll just let it slide if they miss out on the first place?
The fifth prize goes to...
And then there's also Szymanowski, their fellow countryman!
Surely you know just how badly the Poles want one of their own to win this competition?

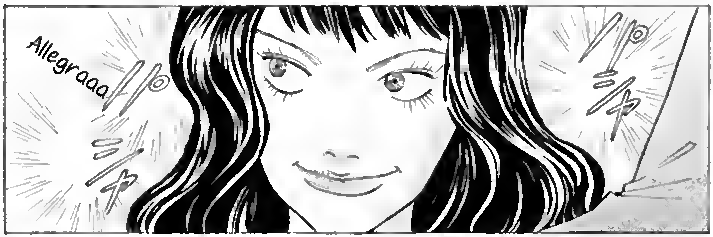
Aubrey Theiss.
Ooooh
ARGHH... SHE'S SO CLOSE...!!

Ba-dump
Ba-dump
Is this it?!
Is it him?!
Ba-dump
Ba-dump
The fourth prize...

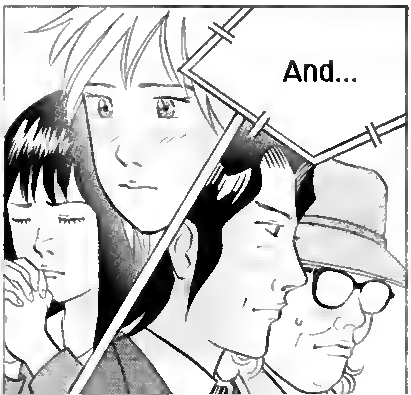
Is not awarded.
So there'll be two people in third place?!
What?!
Ichi...
A tie for third place...?
There are gonna be two people in third place!
Wobble
Ichinose's gonna be one of them!!

The third prize goes to...
K...Kai.
Ba-dump
Ba-dump
Ba-dump
Huh?
Allegra Granados...


アアア


Allegraaa

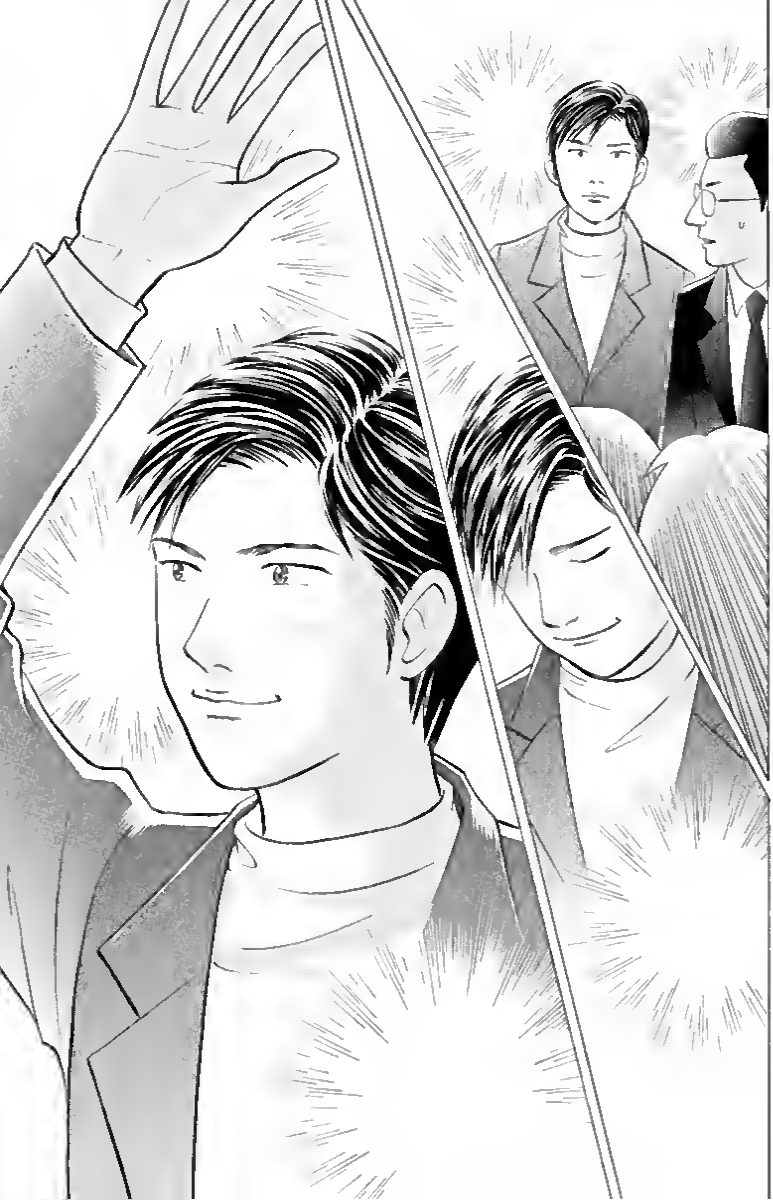
……

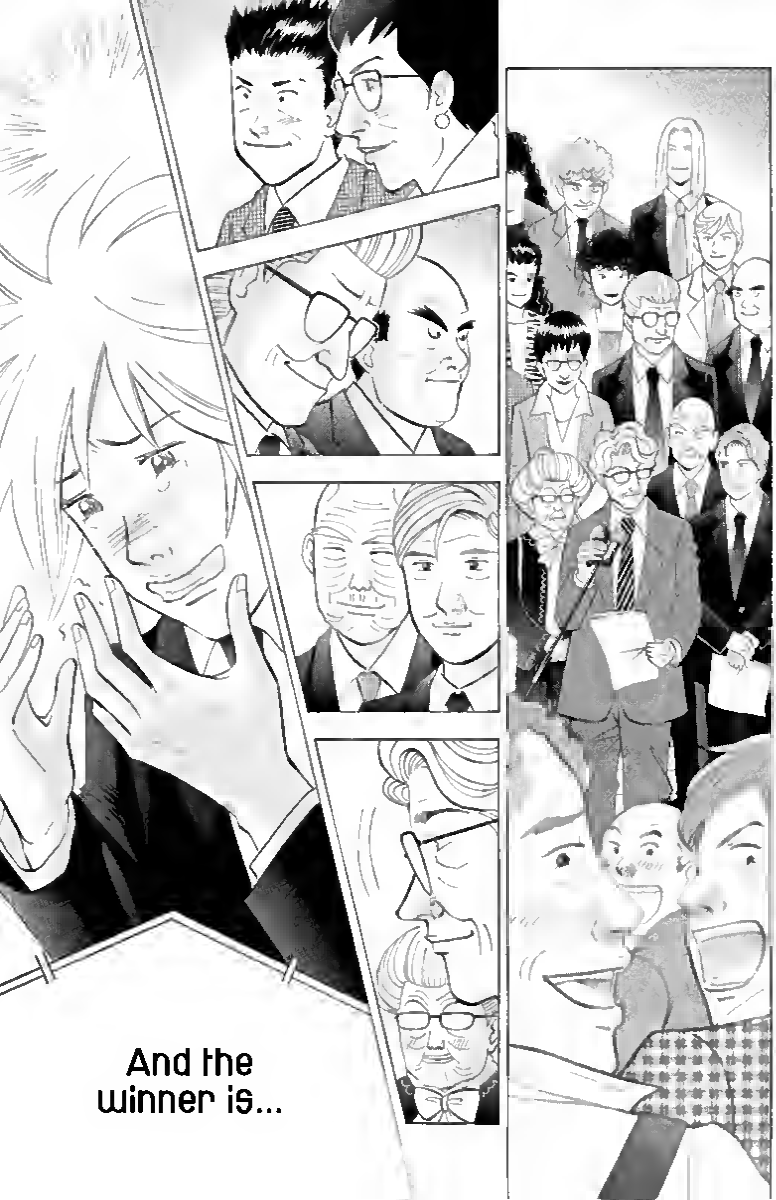

And...

Szymanowski.
Lech...
Lech!!
Kai...
Yeah...
Yes...
Sousuke ...

Ichino-
seee!!!
Yeah.
Kai...
The second prize goes to..
Excuse me!
Please let me pass!
Excuse me!
But please let me...
Make...
Make way!
Let us through!
Our boy Kai... Kai...

Wei Pang.
ウオオオ




And the winner is...

Kai Ichinose.
SOU-SUKE!!

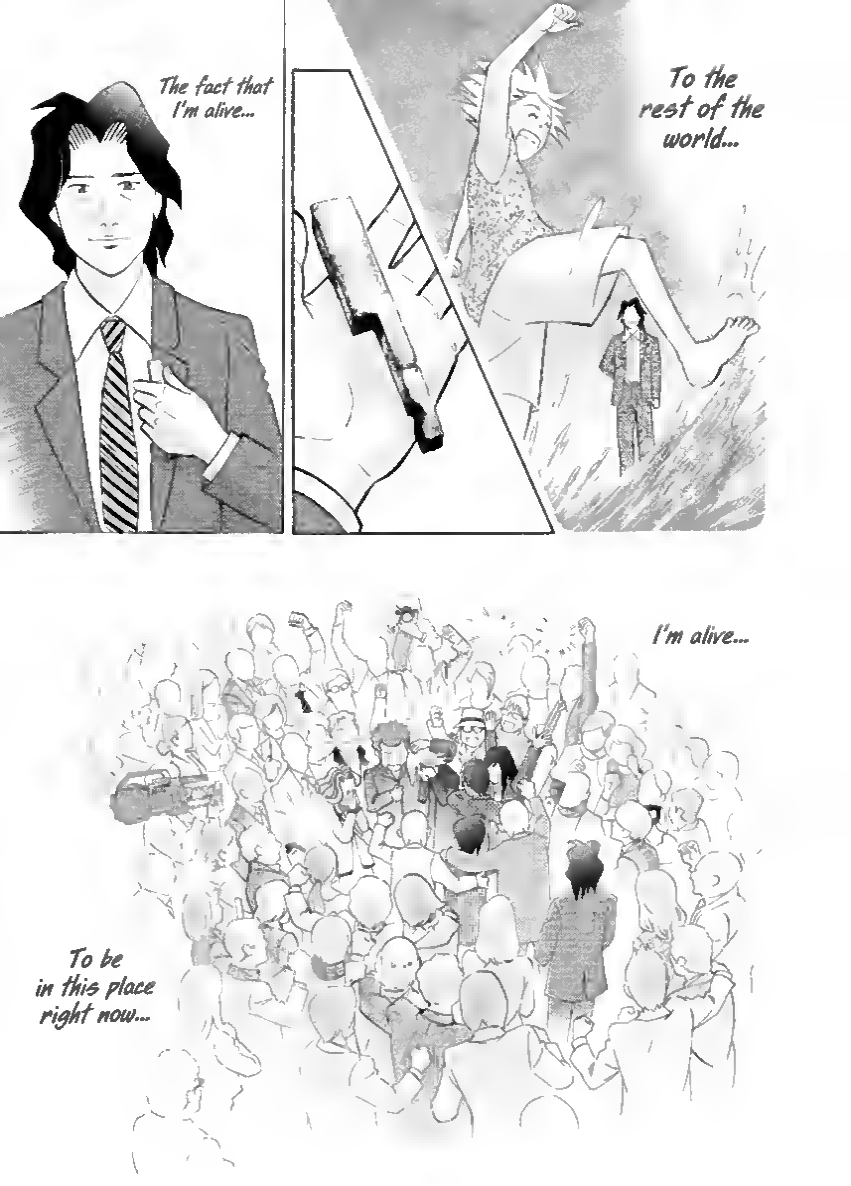
WAAA-
AAAH!!!
LET ME
THROUGH!!
PLEASE
MAKE WAY!
KAI WON!
WE'RE...
HIS FRIENDS!!
KAAAA-
AAAAI!!!

I never...

* A POLISH SONG THAT CONVEYS GOOD WISHES.

Sto lat,
sto lat,
Niech żyje,
żyje nam,
Poland...
Jeszcze raz,
jeszcze raz,
Niech żyje,
żyje nam,
Niech żyje nam !
Everyone
here...
Chopin...
The
God of
Music...
The
Forest...

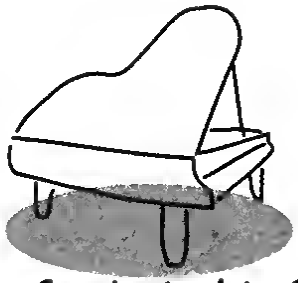
The Piano in the Forest...
My encounter with Kai...
My discovery of Kai's talent...
All the time and effort we have spent...
To show that unique talent...


The fact that I'm alive...
To the rest of the world...
I'm alive...
To be in this place right now...

Announcement of the Final Result (2) END

The next page is the start of a special interview!

QC/N: ACTUALLY, IT ISN'T SINCE THE TRANSLATOR IS TRASH. THE SPECIAL INTERVIEW (READ: WALLS OF TEXT) WILL HAVE TO COME NEXT WEEK.



The Perfect World of KAI

MUSIC SUPERVISION / SHIMODA KOJI

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by ISSHIKI Makoto
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#2

No. 37 Ichinose Kai (Japan)

"Forest of the Piano" ❖ Chopin International Piano Competition ❖ Contestant Interview!!

※ Starting from the next page is the interview article published in the Chopin Competition Special Issue of a classical music magazine after the end of the competition

Standing Ovation!

"I felt that I really did it with the concerto I played in the Final Round. The reaction from the audience also made me really happy!"

A star was born. Absolute command over the introduction of Movement I. Complete mastery over the Mazurka and Polonaise. Clear passages. Incandescent notes. An explosive coda. The miraculously beautiful cantabile in Movement II. The Krakowiak that conveys Poland's sunny, far-reaching great plains. When his vivid Piano Concerto No. 1 came to an end, the audience in Warsaw hailed Ichinose Kai with a standing ovation.

Regarding such warm enthusiasm, which showed no signs of dying down at the Philharmonic Hall, Ichinose Kai has this to say.

"When I was performing, I always felt that I was back in the Forest, playing the Piano in the Forest. That's how I was able to be so free. However, my mentor Ajino-sensei said, 'You can play even if you can no longer return to the Forest.' That was about a year ago, I think. 'Play even more freely,' he told me. And today, when I finished playing, I felt that I had really taken off from the Forest. It truly was an amazing feeling!

"What my friend Amamiya Shuhei-kun told me, that 'Poland is a country built on plains,' was also very important to my performance today. 'Chopin was a man of the plains,' he said. Which is why my music sounded like I was playing beneath the sky on the vast Polish land," enthused an Ichinose who simply could not help feeling delighted by a satisfactory performance.

But speaking of which, what exactly is the "Piano in the Forest"?

"The 'Piano in the Forest' is... (laughs) believe it or not, a piano abandoned in my backyard at home. When I was little, I fell out of the second-floor window and landed right on top if it. Ever since then, I had been playing it for fun. Everyone said that it no longer worked from sitting there for so long, that it made no sound, but I grew up with that piano. To tell the truth, if the 'Piano in the Forest' had not burned down, it would always be my most cherished treasure."

It sounds like something that comes right out of a fantasy, but whether you give credence to his words, it is, in the end, a heart-warming story. Ichinose is the only student of Ajino Sousuke, who has himself participated in the Chopin International Piano Competition and given a performance that stirred up much sensational discussion. However, his career was cut short not long afterwards by an unfortunate accident. Wei Pang has also been greatly influenced by Ajino's playing, and his encounter with Ajino and Ichinose must have been quite something.

"Ajino-sensei was the music teacher at my elementary school. Amamiya-kun also studied at that school, which is pretty incredible, now that I think about it. I didn't like Ajino-sensei all that much back then, and I certainly didn't know he used to be a famous pianist. It was just by chance that he started teaching me how to play the piano."

Actually, this was not the first time I had listened to Ichinose's playing. It was when he performed Mozart's Sonata K280 at the Japan National Students' Piano Contest in fifth grade. The outrageous performance given by a barefoot boy who had kicked off his shoes was as free-spirited as an eagle fledgling flapping its wings to the sky. And now, the fledgling has grown immensely into a seventeen-year-old full-fledged eagle and taken to the sky, carrying the spirit of Chopin.

"You have listened to my playing from when I was in elementary school? That's kind of embarrassing (laughs). My playing was pretty shoddy back then. Since I usually played the Piano in the Forest barefoot, I hated stepping on the pedal with shoes (laughs). Afterwards, Ajino-sensei tried all sorts of ways to help me get used to playing the piano with shoes on, like making me wear ballet shoes.

"When I got eliminated in that contest, Ajino-sensei said something like, 'I am going to take Kai out to the world.' Then last year, he told me to 'surpass everything in the world.' Sensei always talks big (laughs). Still, it was these words that have brought me to Warsaw."

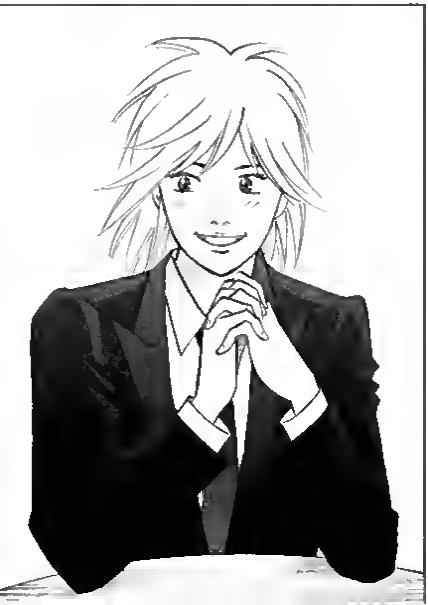
"Nasza Polska!!!"

In this year's competition, 80 contestants from 19 countries qualified in the Preliminaries. The First Round took place over the course of nine days, and Ichinose's turn was on the final day.

He started by playing Etude Op. 10 No. 1-2, with no break in between. It was an exquisite performance. These two pieces are some of the most challenging etudes in Chopin's repertoire, but his playing was as fine as feather. He then moved on to Nocturne Op. 9 No. 3, whose ascending scale at the end was remarkably moving. His three pieces from Waltzes Op. 64 were identical to the ones played by Szymanowski, who performed before him, but with the sequence inverted. His *Minute Waltz*, the last of his waltzes, was particularly outstanding. His following Ballade No. 4 was also legendary, starting out as charming as a forest's whispering and ending with a coda as fiery as a raging inferno. He then went on to playing the latter twelve of Chopin's 24 preludes with the same blazing spirit. He hit the final D with his fist.

"Sensei and I have been preparing together for the Chopin International Piano Competition ever since I was in elementary school. That's why my performance in the First Round was a dream-come-true to me. Rather than being scared, I was extremely thrilled that the time had finally come for me to step onto this long-awaited stage.

"When I first came on stage, I was really touched by the Chopin relief hanging up there. Playing Etude Op. 10 No. 1-2 back-to-back was a challenge, but I pulled it off. For the waltzes, I wanted to put the *Minute Waltz* at the end no matter what, because it was a piece filled with childhood memories. And whenever I play Ballade No. 4, memories of the Piano in the Forest would come rushing back to me when I get to the end.



"As for the 24 Preludes, Szymanowski, who went before me, coincidentally played No. 7-12, so I kind of felt like I was picking up where he left off. The preludes were the pieces that Sensei taught me one by one, going from the relatively easier ones to the more difficult ones, when I was little."

This young man recalls with delight how he had to remain on stage for the standing ovation of 3 minutes 15 seconds that he received in the First Round. His story really is fascinating. One can never lie when it comes to music, though one is also free while playing music.

"For the Second Round, I played Mazurka Op. 50. Playing No. 1 is like dancing energetically on a field, No. 2 gives the feeling of basking in the warm sunlight in spring, and No. 3 is filled with Poland's hardships and Chopin's love for his homeland. I love this piece very much."

His mazurka was fantastic, indeed. It won generous praise from the academic Professor Ekiert and actually moved Professor Weber to tears. Then came the explosively overwhelming *Heroic Polonaise*, which compelled the Polish audience to applaud and chant "Nasza Polska (Our Poland)!!!" before the programme even ended. It was truly an incredible sight.

"The applause made me really happy, but it certainly came as a surprise (laughs). Still, I had been playing in an almost dream-like state, so thank god I managed to get into Sonata No. 3 after collecting myself. I think of the sonata as a way to exude my inner energy. Ajino-sensei had tried all sorts of things through trial and error to help me master it. I learned the pianissimo in Movement III from Jean-Jacques Serrault's playing. I really have him to thank for that!"

"It really was the best feeling in the world!" - Looking Ahead

And here we are, on the last day of the Final Round. To prepare for this, Amamiya has been playing the orchestral accompaniment on a second piano.

"I was so happy I could cry. Practicing with Amamiya-kun was meant to be serious preparation for me, but it was fun nonetheless. His piano playing has always been my favorite. There are all sorts of wonderful playing in this year's competition, aren't there? For example, Wei Pang's music really blew me away. It's fantastic to just live in his time!"

I have diligently observed the Finals of all the Chopin Competitions in the last twenty years, but I have never once seen a performance like Ichinose's or an audience so rapt. The lights went out in the middle of his performance, but he played the accident to his advantage. He further surprised the audience by playing to the end of the piece along with the orchestra.

"'The Final is not the end – it's the beginning,' Ajino-sensei said during my lesson on the first day of the Final Round. I'd be glad if today really marks a new beginning.

"What happened with the lights didn't really bother me. After all, I was raised by the Forest of the Piano, and often played the piano at night, even when there was no moonlight at all (laughs). In the dark, my ears and other senses... come alive. I can hear everything -- the sound of the piano, the rustling of the wind, the whispering of the insects. Playing with the orchestra feels a lot like playing in the Forest to me. My senses are actually sharper in the dark.

"Then at the end, I felt like I had taken off from the Forest... which was a first for me.

"I know it probably isn't a good idea to play the last part with the orchestra in a competition, but I was on cloud nine... It really was the best feeling in the world!"

To us, there is no better gift than all the performances Ichinose Kai has given on the stage of this competition.

And finally, let's hear what works he would like to play in the future:

"Chopin, of course. I also want to challenge myself with all sorts of works. Any specific pieces? Mozart's Concerto for Two Pianos and his sonatas!

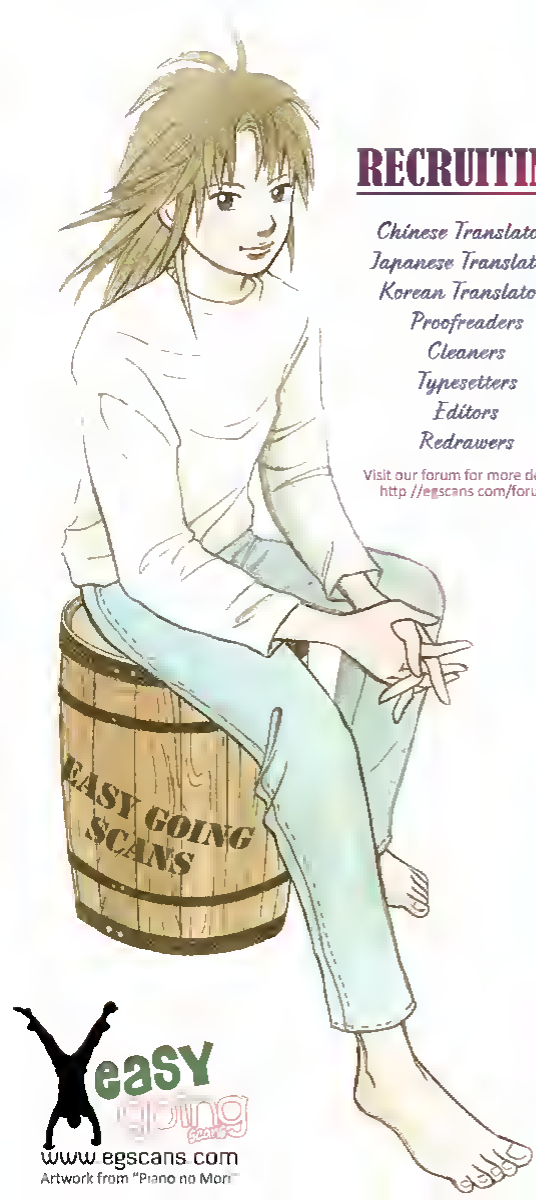
"Who will be my partner? I'll have to ask around (laughs)."

The Chopin International Piano Competition has seen the birth of many outstanding performers, but from this day onward, the name "Kai Ichinose" will surely become a legend.

All the best to the future of this young man!

- FIN -

This interview was conducted in the contestant waiting room after Ichinose Kai's performance in the Final Round and before the announcement of the result.



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Artwork from "Piano no Mori"